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Kunapipi 16 (2) 1994 Full Version

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Abstract

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With **UNIQUE BRIGHTENERS & FRESHENERS**

THE COLD WAR CLEANING SPECIALIST



KUNAPIPI

VOLUME XVI NUMBER 2
1994

Kunapipi is a tri-annual arts magazine with special but not exclusive emphasis on the new literatures written in English. It aims to fulfil the requirements T.S. Eliot believed a journal should have: to introduce the work of new or little known writers of talent, to provide critical evaluation of the work of living authors, both famous and unknown, and to be truly international. It publishes creative material and criticism. Articles and reviews on related historical and sociological topics plus film will also be included as well as graphics and photographs.

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COVER: 'World Power' by Richard Kelly Tipping.

Kunapipi refers to the Australian Aboriginal myth of the Rainbow Serpent which is the symbol both of creativity and regeneration. The journal's emblem is to be found on an Aboriginal shield from the Roper River area of the Northern Territory in Australia.

CONTENTS

FICTION

<i>Beverley Farmer, 'First Morning'</i>	7
<i>Steven Heighton, 'Downing's Fast'</i>	53
<i>Olive Senior, 'The Lizardy Man and His Lady'</i>	82

POETRY

<i>Richard Kelly Tipping, 'Literary Television'</i>	27
<i>'Southern Crossing Melbourne, 1993'</i>	28
<i>'Hear the Art (Earth Heart), 1994'</i>	29
<i>'The Australian Touch, 1988'</i>	30
<i>'Caution, 1993'</i>	31
<i>'Roadworks, 1992'</i>	32
<i>'Sunlight Soap Opera, 1992'</i>	33
<i>'The Poem Considered as a Lover, 1994'</i>	34
<i>Julian Croft, 'The Consolation of Poetry'</i>	48
<i>Ouyang Yu, 'Song for an Exile in Australia'</i>	49
<i>'Feet'</i>	50
<i>'Making Love Making Poetry'</i>	52

ARTICLES

<i>Veronica Brady, 'The Innocent Gaze: John Boyle O'Reilly's "The King of the Vasse"'</i>	1
<i>Amanda Nettlebeck, 'Expanding Boundaries: Changing Perceptions of "Asia" in Two Australian Novels'</i>	13
<i>Richard Kelly Tipping, 'Subvertising: Word Works'</i>	24
<i>Bruce Bennett, 'Living Spaces: Some Australian Houses of Childhood'</i>	35
<i>Amin Malak, "'The World Is Your People": The Time of the Peacock and the Evolution of an Australian Identity'</i>	43
<i>Edmund O. Bamiro, 'Recasting the Centre: Ngugi wa Thiong'o and the Africanization of English'</i>	65
<i>Louis James, 'How Many Islands Are There in Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea?'</i>	77
<i>John Thieme, "'Mixed Worlds": Olive Senior's Summer Lightning'</i>	90

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

96

Editorial

It seemed appropriate, given the lead article and visual material on subvertising, to dedicate this issue to scholars whom many would regard as subversive. These scholars were people who, whilst they were well versed in the so-called 'canonical texts of Empire', had the vision to recognize at a very early date that there was a wide body of literature in those countries which had formerly been coloured red on the map of the world. One cannot overestimate the influence of these scholars, not only on the students they taught, but also on the younger generations taught by their students. Time has justified their foresight and Richard Tipping's warning, 'Caution. There is No Avant-Garde. Only Those Who Have Been Left Behind' is, I believe, a very appropriate remark. And so I dedicate this issue to Victor Dupont, R.T. Robertson, Doireann MacDermott, Bernard Hickey, Hena Maes-Jelinek, Britta Olinder, Michel Fabre and Lars Hartveit and, on behalf of many others, thank them for their vision.

ANNA RUTHERFORD

VERONICA BRADY

The Innocent Gaze: John Boyle O'Reilly's 'The King of the Vasse'



Tabula rasa. The world a new leaf and on the new leaf, nothing. The white clarity of the Australian, fragile atmosphere. Without a mark, a record.¹

Australia, the Great South Land, existed in the European imagination for thousands of years before the first settlement in 1788: 'Last sea-thing dredged by sailor Time from Space.'²

Very old yet very new, the newly discovered continent represented a challenge to the imagination, a challenge to relate its time, a 'timeless' time, outside the history in which we locate ourselves as Europeans, and its space – to our eyes it is a great and strange emptiness, '*terra nullius*', to ours.

By and large over time we have responded to that challenge, although the High Court's Mabo decision and the growing pressure from Aboriginal Australians claiming their rights and our attention has begun to suggest that it is not completely resolved. My purpose in this essay, therefore, is to take us back to the first moment of encounter, as it was registered by an illustrious and adventurous Irishman, John Boyle O'Reilly, appropriately enough in a collection of essays dedicated to Doireann MacDermott.

O'Reilly (1844-89), patriot, scholar and man of letters, had been sentenced to death for his part in the abortive uprising of 1865, a sentence commuted to transportation. He arrived in Western Australia in January 1868 on the last convict ship, the *Hougomont*. The next year he managed to escape on an American whaler and, after many adventures, reached Boston, where he became an important figure in the Irish community and later organised the rescue from Western Australia of his five fellow Fenian prisoners, the celebrated '*Catalpa* escape'. Our interest here, however, is in one of the poems he wrote later, looking back at his experience in the bush around Bunbury in the south of Western Australia, 'The King of the Vasse'.

This poem celebrates the experience we have been talking about – the 'moment of verbal and visual crisis as the colonial intruder stands dumb-founded before an inexpressible landscape'.³ It is long, about 700 lines, part narrative, part landscape description and part meditation. It attempts

to give voice to a landscape that seems strangely mute and mysterious and to the Aboriginal culture which belongs to it, aware not only of physical strangeness but also of inhabiting a different history and world-view.⁴ Unlike most of his contemporaries, O'Reilly is evidently fascinated by the land and respectful of Aboriginal culture, even if for descriptive purposes he tends to subsume it into his own categories – the Aboriginal leader is represented as a King, for instance, and his dress is reminiscent of the legendary High Kings of Ireland:

Across his breast the aged ruler wore
A leathern thong or belt...
... a short fur loka hung
In toga-folds upon his back, but flung
From his right arm and shoulder, ever there
The spear arm of the warrior is bare.

Similarly, the ceremony in which the King asserts his power, raised aloft the sacred pearl which is his talisman, is compared with the Catholic Mass:

With both long hands he raised the enthroned gem
And turned him toward the strangers: e'en on them
Before the lovely thing, an awe did fall
To see that worship deep and mystical,
That King did with upraised god, like rev'rent priest
With elevated Host at Christian feast.

O'Reilly could be accused here of Orientalism, of course, of imposing his Eurocentric perceptions. But as Said defines it, Orientalism is a 'relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony'⁵ and O'Reilly's poem is about the power he senses in the Aborigines and their culture, their domination of their environment and affinity with some spiritual power which gives them a superiority over the newly arrived Europeans.

The poem begins in the early days of settlement before the introduction of the convict system:

Ere that fair Southern land was stained with crime
Brought thitherward in reeking ships and cast
Like blight upon the coast.

The indictment of this system is strong, cast in moral rather than merely political terms – not surprisingly, in the light of O'Reilly's own experiences:

So lives this land today beneath the sun,
A weltering plague spot, where the hot tears run,

And hearts to ashes turn, and souls are dried
Like empty kilns where hopes have parched and dried.

His focus, however, is on an earlier, more innocent time: 'Before the young land saw the old land's sins/ Sail up the orient ocean.' Australia figured then as a land of promise and he describes a Swedish family who have left behind an exhausted land and failing crops to '... sail where south winds fan the sea,/ And happier [they] and all [their] race shall be'.

The descriptions here of the new land are different from usual. There is little sense here of the 'weird melancholy' which Marcus Clarke found the characteristic note of the Australian landscape. Instead, O'Reilly gives us a sense of wonder and expectation as the migrants catch their first glimpse of the land:

...Every lip
Was pouring praise for what the eye did meet -
For all the air was yellow as with heat
Above the peaceful sea and dazzling sand
That wooed each other round the beauteous land,
Where inward stretched the slumbering forest's green.

Similarly, the descriptions of the forest are in the best traditions of the picturesque:

Earth throbs and heaves
With pregnant prescience of life and leave;
The shadows darken 'neath the tall trees' scree,
While round their stems the rank and velvet green
Of undergrowth is deeper still;

Where writers like Adam Lindsay Gordon found 'flowers that had no scent and birds that had no song', O'Reilly finds a tropical paradise:

And there, 'mid shaded green and shaded light
The steel-blue silent birds take rapid flight
From earth to tree and tree to earth; and there
The crimson-plumaged parrot cleaves the air
Like flying fire.

The first glimpse of the Aborigines is equally legendary:

'neath the wood
That lined the beach a crowd of watchers stood:
Tall men spear-armed, with skins like dusky night,
And aspect blended of deep awe and fright.

O'Reilly's view here is closer to that of the first French explorers of the Western coast than to those of the British. Like them, and also, like

Captain Cook, he assumes the Enlightenment's notion of one common humanity, the view that all creatures belong to the one God and aspire to him, the view which gave rise to the notion of the Noble Savage⁶ – in contrast with the neo-Darwinian view which, combined with imperial notions of the British Empire with ancient Rome and of the British as God's chosen, tended to the Manichean division which, contrasting 'white' to 'black' as good to evil, superior to inferior, civilised to savage, and so on, led them to see the Aborigines as degraded, barely human, 'the very zero of civilisation', as one settler saw them, 'the connecting link between man and the monkey tribe.'⁷

Irishmen like O'Reilly had felt in their own lives the effects of such attitudes – despite their 'white' skins, the Irish were often regarded as little more than beasts and despised for the poverty caused by their British rulers. But his world-view was more expansive. For him the crucial questions were not merely economic or political but metaphysical. This is clear in a speech he made to a group of black Americans in 1886, not long before his death:

The thing that most deeply afflicts the colonial American is not going to be cured by politics. You have received from politics about all it can give you. You may change the law by politics; but it is not the law that is going to insult and outrage and excommunicate every colored American for generations to come... Politics tickles the skin of the social order; but the disease lies deep in the internal organs...⁸

What he is concerned with, then, is internal, the spirit's response to the new land.

At first it seems disastrous. When they first see the coastline, Jacob, the settlers' six year old son, utters a wailing cry and then lies lifeless in his mother's arms. But once ashore, the aboriginal 'King' approaches, blesses the apparently lifeless child with his talisman, the pearl, and he comes back to life. Later, he goes off with them and becomes their King, but returns to his own people when the Aborigines turn against him.

The implications are interesting. The child's name is Jacob, the name of the eponymous ancestor of the people of Israel. Similarly, this child is a go-between between Aborigines and non-Aborigines. His cry at the first glimpse of land is portentous:

Like one deep spell-bound did he seem to be,
And moved by some strange phantasy; his eyes
Were wide distended as in glad surprise
At something there he saw.

Something wonderful seems to be beckoning him:

...his arms reached o'er
The vessel's side as if to greet the shore,
And sounds came from his lips like sobs of joy.

His apparent death is rather the trance of a hierophant, about to enter into this larger mystery. So the Aboriginal 'King', master of the land, returns him to life and later inducts him into his people as his successor. While Jacob's family prospers:

...Soon bending green
Land herds and homesteads and a teeming soil
A thousand-fold repaid their patient toil,

he has a different task:

...He chose
The woods as home, the wild, uncultured men
As friends and comrades.

True, the settlers do not understand this choice and mutter against him. Jacob's identification with the people of the land is necessary for them all, it is implied. Later, it is true, the Aborigines turn against him, driving him out, destroying his power by destroying his talisman, the pearl, registering the malignancy which so soon settled on relations between Aborigines and settlers.

Stripped of this talisman which unites him with them, Jacob then returns home to his own people, like Rip Van Winkle in that other colonial myth. His family are all dead and no-one knows the white-haired old man who comes so strangely amongst them to tell over again the story of the first arrival, his ear attuned still to 'far-off voices growing still more clear', until his peaceful death, alone in the bush, which concludes the poem as the people gather around him:

Laid earthward on his hands; and all the place
Was dim with shadow where the people stood.
And as they gathered there, the arching wood
Seemed filled with awful whisperings, and stirred
By things unseen.

A kind of priestly figure, he has been taken away from his own family to serve some larger purpose. So it is not too far-fetched to suggest that in telling his story O'Reilly is exploring the possibilities of mutual understanding between the Aboriginal inhabitants of the land and the settlers, setting himself in this way against the disastrous division, the Manichean allegory which has for so long divided 'white' from 'black' as good from evil. This conclusion also suggests that reconciliation will only come when both groups share sense of worship – in death his hands still hold the pearl's shrine.

This is not a major poem. Nevertheless it touches on a theme which has become important recently in Australian literature, the theme of the 'white' aborigine, touched on by Patrick White in *A Fringe of Leaves* and

more recently by David Malouf's *Remembering Babylon*. In a collection of essays dedicated to Doireann MacDermott, it is good to be able to recall the memory of an Irishman who explored this theme in his own way a hundred years ago.

NOTES

The text of the poem is to be found in James Jeffrey Roche, ed., *John Boyle O'Reilly, His Life, Poems and Speeches* (Boston: Publisher unknown, 1890), pp. 685-712.

1. D.H. Lawrence, *Kangaroo* (London: Penguin, 1950), p. 365.
2. Bernard O'Dowd, 'Australia', in H.P. Heseltine, ed., *The Penguin Book of Australian Verse* (Melbourne: Penguin, 1976), p. 95.
3. Anne McLintock, 'Poetry in the Older Australian Landscape', in E.L. Ruhe & F.H. Mares, eds., *Mapped But Not Known: The Australian Landscape of the Imagination* (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 1986), p. 21.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Peregrine Books, 1985), p. 5.
6. Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays In Cultural Criticism* (London: John Hopkins University Press, 1986), p. 193.
7. John Harris, *One Blood, Two Hundred Years of Aboriginal Encounter with Christianity: A Story of Hope* (Sydney: Albatross Books, 1990), p. 24.
8. John Boyle O'Reilly, *His Life, Poems and Speeches*, op. cit., p. 289.

BEVERLEY FARMER

First Morning

When Bell wakes she is warm at last, hugging the ache of her belly to her like a hot water bottle. She has come out of a blank sleep with a sickly sweet smell – jasmine? – in her face and the conviction that the old man's grave is out there in the kitchen garden under the grass and hyacinths, flanked by the olive trees. *Zoumboulia*. They are what she can smell, not jasmine, hyacinths. Flowers that can sprout and grow in the space of a jar in a cupboard, needing no light, no soil, their fat whiskery bulbs fattening like fungi on nothing but dark water. They are too rich, too cloying, like bottled scent. They might as well be immortelles out there, the old man's hyacinths, squatting on their leaves with petals of tinted plastic in thick shavings, pink, blue and white, so solid. Fleshy to the touch, with the clammy coldness of underwater flowers that are animals in disguise, sponges and soft corals and sea anemones, windflowers, sea windflowers with their clutch of tentacles.

The village is too far inland for any breath of salt to come on the wind, even a south wind. How could I have hoped to make a home here, she thinks, so far from the sea? I was not alone in that. Grigori, all of the family, expected no less. They welcomed me as a bride to the house. The old man bought two kids that a neighbour had been fattening for Easter, slaughtered and roasted them at Aunt Magdalini's, in her beehive oven, white-washed, an igloo out in her yard, filled with embers and soot, while we ate and drank there under the moon. Without saying anything too definite to my parents, who would only worry, we had all our household goods shipped over here in crates. To think that some are here to this day, white cups with a silver rim, a wedding present, and the red enamel pot, and the blue and white striped milk jug, cracked now, all going strong and set to outlast us all. Even the old teatowels are here. The black swans on them Mamma took to be a negative, never having seen any but white swans. Black swans? *Ade!* You are teasing me. No, Mamma, in a negative, I said, the beaks would have to be green not red, and her face set in an incredulous smile, Grigori's smile, loftily amused, tinged with pity, or scorn.

Within a week of our coming Baba fell ill. He blamed the roast kid, Mamma the ouzo and tobacco, while the rest of the village said it was his excess of joy in having his son home after ten years in the foreign land. Poor Baba Yanni, the joy was too much for him: all the wise heads nodded

and sighed. Whatever the truth of it, in Easter week his ulcer perforated and for most of the summer he lay in bed, in the hospital and then here: back from the dead, agreed the wise heads. It was the ulcer, turning cancerous, that was to bury him in the end, nowhere near the kitchen garden – how could she have thought so? – unless in spirit. He is in the cemetery, *to koimitíri*. The sleeping place. *Koimísou kalá*, the words of parting, at the threshold or turning over under the covers, last thing at night. Sleep well. Here the dead have a field to sleep in, not the churchyard or anywhere near the church, but a field out on the main road in the middle of other fields, of barley, wheat, tobacco. What has the old man got growing over him, if not his hyacinths? There was a time when the hyacinth was a flower of the dead; as was the windflower. The Greeks of those days buried the dead in earthenware pots underground, along with the pots of seed corn that lay waiting to be born again. They sowed grain on the graves then, in the name of the great goddess, the womb of earth and sea, the *mítra*, ample Dimitra.

At least Bell is warm now. In the middle of the night the cold woke her more than once and kept her awake and shivering rubbing her feet against each other in their thick socks. Without opening her eyes she was sure for a good part of the night that she was home. Not in her own bed: in a swag under the sky, camping in the desert, like last year, in a deep frost, in Queensland. Her bladder was keeping her awake, swelling until she was a bubble of golden fluid lying under the black and white frost of the desert moonlight, a giant white-legged honey ant. It was impossible to get up and piss without disturbing the whole camp. Not until sunrise, with the ice shining in strings all around, the panes of ice crackling under the sleeping bags, could she squat at a safe distance and let it go steaming out of her with the soft hiss which where she comes from means a snake in the sand of the dunes, in the tea tree scrub, a snake or a lizard; but here there was no cover and nothing alive in sight. The piss was stained red, she remembers, a shocking red, half blood, the start of her period, days before she was due. It ran away in darkening seams of the sand which spread on every side full of shadow and honey light as far as the horizon.

Even her breasts are aching now. Holding her breath she presses her fingers into her belly to measure the watery roll and quiver of it. If she could only get out to the *méros* and back without disturbing the old woman! Her own grasp chills her and she shivers. The warmest part of me, she thinks, is this hoard of body heat, this piss, molten gold, so I might as well hang on to it.

Eight o'clock, and no sound in the house. Opening the door on to the grey *sála* she catches a mutter of prayer: candlelight runs along the edge of the kitchen door. Yawning, she shuts the door gently and lies down again. The air is hard to breathe. The window will creak if she opens it any more, and Mamma will hear. The covers are musty, and the mattress where she always slept, and where Grigori slept only last summer with

his new wife who is carrying – Bell reminds herself – a child. Unless she has given birth by now. The whole room is musty from the lack of sun. In the summer they will have flung the shutters wide open and flat to the outside walls first thing every day to let the sun in, just as Bell used to; and when she latched them for the afternoon sleep the gold heat of the afterglow would last until they woke at around five for coffee. This summer they will put the baby down and then lie down themselves, naked in the clear heat, the light.

She is asleep when the handle grates and the door is flung open. She has to roll on her back yawning to cover her shock.

'*Kaliméra*. So, are you warm?' Kyria Sophia comes and thrusts her hands in under the covers, in a rush, the way Bell has seen her do in the hay under a broody hen. At her touch a twitch of shock runs through Bell, so strong that it must have shown in her face, only Mamma can't see it, she is almost on her knees by the bed, with her head ducked down between her arms. 'Ah, yes. You are.'

The kitchen is dark, as it always was even in summer. The window, which has no shutters and needs none, is half the wall wide but it looks straight out on the mudbricks of the old barn, where the flounces of dried tobacco used to hang from the rafters out of the reach of the rats, like so many fox pelts in the gloom.

There is honey, and bread to toast on the lid of the *sóm̃ba*, but Bell has remembered the *trahaná* porridge of the old days. Kyria Sophia switches the light on and rummages in the dresser until she finds some that she made last year or the year before, from her own eggs and flour, of course, hand-rubbed and sun-dried: only not the milk sort, these are the sour ones, made with yoghurt. These are better, Bell says, and Kyria Sophia agrees, only fried with onions and peppers, not with honey. Yes, yes! Don't they serve yoghurt with honey all over Greece? Well, then!

So at last Bell is allowed to boil a handful of the little grits until they swell like rice and the yeasty sourness comes to life; with milk, honey, the taste of the first days, the past.

On the way to the *méros* Bell hangs back among the photos on the wall. A new ikon among the others on the side wall has caught her eye, a figure coffined in a dark blue shroud, a Panagia in gold leaf and lapis lazuli: a postcard of a fresco half-soaked into some old wall. *At Mistra, Love from Grigori* is scrawled in Greek on the back, with the new wife's signature underneath. The Dormition of the Virgin, Bell thinks, but when she looks closely it turns out to be a Nativity, in a grotto in a mountain of golden rock, spiny, with the flared mouth of a whelk and a ragged summit like a sheaf of ripe corn. The Panagia's eyelids are brown and swollen and her lips tight. She lies back stiffly, one hand to her cheek, as if she is carved of wood. A goat and a tawny ass drop their heads into the manger. The

Magi draw near on horseback, and in the rocks are saints and angels in robes, suns at their heads, and twisted bodies so light that they float in a gold wind.

No sooner has Zoumboulia settled herself by the *sómba* than Aunt Kalliopi drops in with a granddaughter and kisses Bell in welcome. 'Here you are again. Well I remember the day you first came and the forgiven one, he nearly died of joy. You have well received her,' she tells Kyria Sophia, who nods, intent on her crochet hook. Bell makes coffee and conversation, watching the girl as she flicks through the book that Bell has got out of her case this morning to read, and murmurs phrases aloud. Aunt Kalliopi smiles. 'Lyka is learning English now, you see, Bella.'

'Are you, Lyka?'

'Yes, I am learning English.'

'Good! Do you like it?'

'Yes, I like it very much. What book is this?'

'Tracks. It is by a woman.' Lyka looks blank and Bell goes on in Greek: 'Who walked across the desert alone with four camels and a dog.'

'An Australian? No! – you have no camels in Australia!'

'We have now. Afghans went there with their camels and let them loose a long time ago. They run wild in the desert. But she bought hers.'

'English, English!' Aunt Kalliopi pleads.

'Have you gone into the desert, Aunt Bella?'

'Yes, last year, but on a truck, not a camel. And not alone.'

'Are there petrol wells like in Iraq and in Kuwait?'

'No, and that is a great blessing,' Bell says. 'Our wells only have water.'

Lyka is frowning with the effort. 'Do they have sweet water?'

'Some have sweet water and some have salt.'

'What is this word treks?'

'Tracks? Ichni.' Although *íchni* is more like *traces*. Struggling in the blankness of her memory, Bell comes up with *monopátia*. *Paths*, is that it? And there are other meanings, out of reach. 'And *monopátia*,' she goes on carefully in English. 'It means many things.'

Lyka rewards her with a sunny smile. 'I love best the books of Enid Blyton.'

'Do you, Lyka? I used to love the books of Enid Blyton!'

'The Five?' Lyka shrugs, abandoning English.

'The Five, yes. And the Seven –'

'The Secret Seven! We are in a gang like that, some girlfriends and I –'

'Lyka,' says Aunt Kalliopi.

'– and we go to deserted houses and look for adventures!'

'Lyka, speak English!'

Lyka shrugs. 'Ghosts and secrets, you know.'

'And have you found any?'

'Never! Not once!'

Aunt Kalliopi asks after Yanni and Bell brings out her packet of photos. They pass from hand to hand, Zoumbou and Kalliopi exclaiming at each one. Ach, what a handsome boy! Look, Lyka, don't you think he's handsome? What do you say? Look how she's laughing! She's blushing! He looks so stern in this one. He has the sun in his eyes. He is a piece of gold, that boy, I always said so. Any time now he will come looking for a bride.

When they are gone Bell washes the cups, delighted. 'That Lyka, Mamma! Isn't she a darling?'

Kyria Sophia has sat scowling over her lace the whole time. 'Why? What's so special about her?' she says now; and after a pause, 'What would she want to do that for?'

'What?'

'Her. The one who rides the camels.'

'Well, to see the desert. To be there.'

'To see the desert!'

'The desert is wonderful, Mamma. I want to go back when I can. She went alone to see if she was brave enough, and clever enough. As a test, you understand. No woman had ever done it.'

'And how old is she?'

'Oh – twenty-something. I think she saw it as a sort of –' *Pilgrimage*: but she has forgotten the Greek, and the only word that comes to mind is the Turkish *hadj*.

'Well?'

'A sort of – *hadj* ? The desert was a holy land.'

'You have a shrine in your desert worthy of a *hadj*?'

'The desert itself. The land.'

'It sounds like blasphemy to me.'

The desert, the word, *i érimos*, is feminine, Bell thinks. And the land? *I xirá*, *i steriá*. Yes, and the earth: *i gi*.

'From the deserts prophets come,' she says.

'Not any more they don't. Is she married? No? What's wrong with her, then?'

They go back to the warmth, and Zoumboulia asleep in her black hood.

The desert is the floodwaters, brimful, sheets in yellow and white water until they shrink into a salt lake and into a gulf, leaving a mat of grass and a few trees, alive and dead, like the thaw in Europe, but further north than this. There you find little piles of bones like cold campfires; lashes and coils of tyre rubber by the road, and meshes of pink with ruffs of fur, like fig mash, with a frosting of mould; a car body like the hide of a red cow; a cattle station curtained in corrugated iron, the tank stand broken, and the fences and sheds, and the heap of brown bottles glittering like water. This is the inland sea, the imaginary sea, the glass and air of mirage, a sea of stone and sand for millions of years, and ancient rivers that still run in caves under stone and sand.

A well in the desert, a bore, is a gush of light in skeins out on the plain, and a dark line of shrubs that twists down from there, green pools, for a short way until the sand sucks it dry. Steam drifts loose with a whiff of sulphur, and as you come near you catch sight of a dark standing pipe at the core of a spout of water falling in white frills with a dome, the throb of a glass heart. The rocks are green with slime, and the water slips as smooth as a glove over your hand, blood-warm.

AMANDA NETTLEBECK

Expanding Boundaries: Changing Perceptions of 'Asia' in Two Australian Novels

Discussing the nature of postcolonial conditions in a recent article, Sudesh Mishra suggests that the state of postcoloniality

negotiates four types of historical space – the precolonial, the colonial, the neo-colonial and the postcolonial. These spaces are no longer understood in temporal terms, but as discursive formations; rather than one spatial moment succeeding another in time, each dominant moment, as it emerges in history through discourses of power, is shadowed by its radical or familial alterities.¹

The understanding that postcolonial conditions be considered in terms of co-existent formations of power rather than in terms of a linear temporal shift perhaps has a particular relevance to ex-settler colonies like Australia, where the triangulated relation between the governing body, the colonial settlers and the indigenous dispossessed forged a complex social hierarchy. The effects of that hierarchy are still being mapped out. For instance, co-existing in the sociopolitical rhetoric of 1990s Australia are: the Republican debate, which queries the suitability of maintaining Australia's 'lifeline' to Britain; the Aboriginal land-rights debate, the very controversy of which reveals the ongoing colonised status of the Aboriginal people in 'white' Australia; the Australia/Asia 'exchange' debate, which foregrounds the evolving position of Australia within the Asia-Pacific region; and the multicultural debate, which addresses the degree to which Australian society recognises itself as a heterogeneous one. (Needless to say, the concurrence of these various debates signals that 'nation' is now, as always, subject to a set of competing readings.)

The visibility of these issues in the broader social sphere suggests that Australian society is currently moving into another phase of crisis.² Nevertheless, even though the humanist, homogenizing dangers of nationalism are well-rehearsed in this age of putative multiculturalism (which, like any gesture towards difference within community, in fact conceals the humanist, homogenizing principles that underwrite the structures of law and order), the seductions of nationalism are still very much alive. In particular, the concurrence of the 'Republican/Monarchist' and the 'Asia/

Australia exchange' debates, which simultaneously foreground 'Europe' and 'Asia' as dialectical objects of identification, indicates that the West's archetypal configuration of itself in opposition to an East is still relevant to discussions about Australian nationalism, even as those discussions attempt to undo such a configuration.

Implicit in these current debates about nationalism, then, is a tension between the repudiation and the recuperation of nationalist codes. On the one hand, we live in an age in which the development and general accessibility of air travel and communication technologies have not only led to a global *reduction* of space (in so far as distance is no longer determined so much by mileage but more by the factors of time and expense committed to travelling), but also to the *conflation* of different cultural spaces; for Australians this has meant increasing access to diverse cultures and landscapes and accommodation of them into a broadening understanding of what it is to 'be Australian'. On the other hand, this impression of living in a multicultural – even 'global' – community is underwritten by a heritage of eurocentrism which informs Australia's response to nations beyond its own borders and, in particular, to the Asia Pacific region. Nowhere is this ambivalence clearer than in the ongoing tendency in the Australian media to speak of 'Asia' as a conflated category, at the very moment that it documents increasing communication with and understanding of non-Western societies, religions, economies.³ This tendency was comically highlighted recently in *The Australian* newspaper's account of a social poll which recorded Australians' identification with a location called 'Asia':

Pity the poor pollster who randomly rang [government adviser and economist] Professor Ross Garnaut recently to ask him for a yes or no answer to a simply worded question: 'Is Australia part of Asia?' ... 'I said: "Well that is a silly question" ... I told her Asia was only a concept in Western minds – there is no language in what we call Asia that has traditionally the word "Asia" in it. Asia was that part of the Eurasian continent that the Western Europeans thought was distant and strange. I mentioned that Asia contains many different parts, and that Australia is different from those parts, but they are just as much different from each other. Whereupon she said: "You have to answer yes or no."'"⁴

It seems that Garnaut's apprehension was not shared by the other participants, since the poll's results recorded 'an overwhelming no'.

Even more significantly, perhaps, the framing of such debate tends to imply that a relationship of economic co-operation and cultural exchange depends upon Australia's embracing of its northern neighbours. But as Richard McGregor and David Lague write, in a recent article in the same newspaper, '[Australians] may [be looking] north for inspiration, but [the people we are trying to impress in North, South and East Asia] rarely look south.' As illustration of 'Asia's' lack of interest in Australia, they cite from an interview with one of Singapore's senior politicians, who makes

the comment: "There is a feeling that if Australia remains an economic basket case, it could be a fringe culture for the whole region"; the economics editor of the journal *Asian Business* makes the point that 'it is up to Australia to convince the region that it belongs'.⁵ Australia, it seems, is equally the location of superficial stereotypes, cheap holidays and blank spaces for the peoples of the region as 'Asia' is for Australians: 'After years of effort to promote Australia as a sophisticated country, bristling to export high-tech goods and services ... [the overwhelming images are] of a vast land filled with mines, exotic, cute animals and mostly white people.' Clearly the notion of cultural exchange is not a simple one, fraught as it is by the various specific and often competing forces of economic, political and social conditions.

Such considerations have long been central to the ways in which national literature has been assessed. It seems now that the critical dialogue of a decade ago, which revolved around the question of whether Australian literature (like the literatures of other ex-settler colonies) should be included or excluded under the postcolonial umbrella,⁶ has given way to a focus on the ways in which the various types of 'historical space' outlined by Mishra continue to bear upon each other. This kind of focus is especially relevant to encounters between societies whose experiences of colonialism are complicated by the effects of their own colonial practices. Two novels which self-consciously address the fraught nature of Australia's encounters with a particular location in 'Asia' are Christopher Koch's *The Year of Living Dangerously* (1978) and Gerard Lee's *Troppo Man* (1990).⁷ Both novels deal with Australian responses to particular moments in the invention of the Indonesian republic: Koch's novel takes place in Jakarta during the political crisis of 1965 and Lee's novel revolves around the tourist economy of contemporary Bali. In their different ways, both novels use the fragility and provisionality of Indonesian nationalism in order to explore Australian nationalism in crisis. If this is one of the notable similarities between them, one of the notable differences is the timeframe of their production. Although the novels can't be said to be representative of distinct periods, the years between their appearances are significant enough to raise certain kinds of questions: what might that twelve year difference indicate about Australia's increasing attempts over the last decade or so to negotiate between a history of cultural polarisation and a geographical intimacy? Might the gap in the period of these novels' production reveal an awakening in the Australian consciousness, not so much to what 'Asia' is, but rather to what 'Asia' is not, in terms of prevailing images; an awakening, in other words, not to the nature of 'Asia' but to the nature of Australia's own discursive codes? A further issue raised by these questions is the implication of the burgeoning field of Australian travel literature about Australians in Asia, which has in turn spawned a growing field of literary criticism: to what extent might such texts, which focus on

the act of moving over literal boundaries, challenge or indeed reinforce the limits of a lingering Europe-centred ethic?

In her comprehensive study *The Yellow Lady: Australian Impressions of Asia*, Alison Broinowski identifies the growth in the 1970s and early '80s of a discrete genre of Australian novels set in the Asia Pacific, each of which follows a similar formula.⁸ The typical emphasis in these novels, she says, is on travel to Asia as 'a quest of identity' and she outlines the experiences which dictate this quest and which follow a particular and recurring pattern: there is an experience of arrival, in which the depiction of senses overwhelmed by both sweet exotica and foul poverty matches the literary accounts of Asian harbours from half a century earlier; a mission (which might be superficially professional but is in fact profoundly personal) into the heart of the country, into the 'heart of darkness'; a series of trials to be undergone, involving, as in European mythology, various initiations and/or temptations; and a climax which brings the protagonist to a new self-awareness, and sends her but usually him home, having been 'touched' and changed by Asia without ever having to engage with its cultural complexities, which remain, like its people, both illuminatingly wise and darkly threatening (Broinowski, 175). As Broinowski argues, this sort of fiction, which depicts Asia as inherently paradoxical, as both violent and romantic, had been produced and absorbed for so long that 'it seemed a response to something deeper, something Conrad and Shakespeare knew about when they brought [Marlow] and Kurtz, Prospero and Caliban, together in Illicit Space: the codifiers of enlightenment and the releasers of dark mysteries' (176). She continues: 'If [these Australian authors] had met and decided on themes of universal mythology and how each should apply them to Asia, the results could not have been more congruent' (182). In effect, 'Asia' becomes the site of a Western and specifically first-world touristic nostalgia for the lost moment of hegemonic power in European history; transferred to the imagined landscapes of 'Asia', that moment can be recaptured and exoticised. In the Australian imagination, then, 'Asia' has taken on the properties of what Toril Moi, in discussing the position of women in patriarchy, designates to every frontier: seen as the limit or borderline of the symbolic order, it comes 'to represent the necessary frontier between man and chaos; but because of [its] very marginality [it] will also always seem to recede into and merge with the chaos of the outside'.⁹

The Year of Living Dangerously is a novel which, in different ways, both exposes and reinforces the literary pattern identified by Broinowski. The story it tells is of Australian journalists recording the nationalist narrative which emerged out of the events of 1965 in Indonesia and, in the process, being compelled to confront and overcome their own crisis of national and personal identity. In mapping out this drama, the text self-consciously addresses the degree to which Australia of the 1960s maintained the race-centred anxiety which fed, for instance, the White Australia Policy, which

was not formally abandoned until 1972. The journalists receive the name NEKOLIM – neo-colonial imperialist – and their sexual fantasies about Indonesian women and adolescent boys literalise white Australia's eroticisation of the 'untappable East' as much as their fears of sexual disease literalise their dread of it. Guy Hamilton, the colonial-minded Australian who nurtures a nostalgia for the days of empire, seeks in Jakarta 'childhood's opposite intensities: the gimcrack and the queer mixed with the grim laughter and misery; carnal nakedness and threadbare nakedness; fear and toys' (20). What Guy leaves largely unexplored, despite his attention to Sukarno as a master of media manipulation, is the government's role as a creator and controller of nationalist narrative. The superficiality of his view is identified by his Indonesian assistant Kumar, who recognises Guy's position as a travelling voyeur: "The misuse of this country's wealth has caused misery of which you really know nothing. But you don't have to care. You can go to another country, and write other stories there" (288).

Koch's use of the *wayang kulit*, the Javanese shadow puppet play, as a structural framework for the story, has been critically received as a means of exploring the relation between the metaphysics of a putative West and East, and thereby of avoiding the orientalist tendency to use the former to create the latter. Helen Tiffin has argued, for instance, that Koch's use of the *wayang* in this novel allows him to explore the complexities of colonialism at various levels: firstly the notion of puppetry is crucial to the experience and practice of colonialism, both in Australia (where it continues in the consciousness of Guy Hamilton) and in Indonesia (where it continues, in various guises, under Sukarno's and later Suharto's governments); secondly the *wayang* traditionally allows for a double vision (it may be viewed from the front, where the illusion of the performance is maintained, or from the back, where the puppetry is revealed) which foregrounds the duplicity of the colonial experience; thirdly the puppet play adapted by Koch is patterned after *The Reincarnation of Rama* which is itself a colonial adaptation of the Hindu epic *Bhagavad Gita*, and so the intricacies of colonialism thus become structurally inherent to the unfolding story.¹⁰ In these ways, says Tiffin, the novel's very structure opens up to view 'many of the facets of colonial and trans-cultural experience'; she concludes that '[as] traditional allegiances are eroded, the role Asia plays in Australian thought becomes increasingly complex and important'.¹¹

In another sense, though, *The Year of Living Dangerously* works to reinscribe the very orientalist tendencies it seems to resist. In telling a story in which the mysteries of Jakarta inspire an exploration of the mysteries of the self, the novel then plays out what seems to be a universal theme: the theme of what Koch calls 'the human psyche'.¹² The specificities of Indonesia's political and social crisis are thereby generalised, and indeed romanticised, in the cause of a universal humanism: a humanism which, in the end, mirrors the consciousness not of Kumar or of the Indonesian

prostitutes, who retreat into the darkness from which they came, but of the Anglo-Australian Guy Hamilton. In this sense, it might be argued that Koch's use of the *wayang kulit* as a structuring device does not so much untie the binary relation between East and West as works, after all, to make the former an explanatory text for the latter. The effect of a reflectiveness which casts back the image of the Australian traveller is related to another aspect of the novel which invites closer scrutiny, and this is the fact that the Australian journalists *are* journalists and are therefore the researchers, writers and validators of a particular national narrative which is already dense with the agendas of a powerfully controlled state: as the self-declared 'Mouthpiece of the Indonesian People', Sukarno has 'created this country' through political rhetoric, and his power is that of the Law, the writer of history (*The Year of Living Dangerously*, 12-13). If Sukarno is telling one version of Indonesia, the Australian journalists are writing another which absorbs and builds upon that version. And like Sukarno, the value of their presence is felt through the language they use as the means of cultural authentication. Less problematic than the fact that they fail to get to know Indonesia, then, is the fact that they *do* make a claim to know it, and the language in which they make this claim is English, which works to contain Indonesia's crisis in terms that are readily consumable by an Australian market.

The claim of the cameraman Billy Kwan that he is 'recording history visually' works in a similar way. Photography, after all, has to assume the viable truth of its subject, for it is only in these terms that an image can then be captured and held. Yet as Paul Carter argues, in relation to the use of the camera in another space of anxiety and desire – the Australian landscape of the nineteenth century – photography is 'not a means of recording space but of manipulating it'; of scaling it down, smoothing out difference, reducing it to the view of the viewer. What it creates, in effect, is a 'looking glass world' which the viewer stands looking into and which, although he (in this case) fails to see it, mirrors himself.¹³ Yet in *The Year of Living Dangerously*, although the journalists' sexual exploitation of and social indifference in Indonesia are under question, it seems that the truth-value of their activities there is not. A discourse of authenticity, then, functions in the novel to create an Asia mythified by and gratifying to the Australian consumers of its history, even as the novel self-consciously addresses the processes of that creation.

The act of authenticating the Asia of the Australian gaze is exactly what is made questionable in Gerard Lee's *Troppo Man*. In this novel, the direction of the gaze is reversed; the creation of a 'looking glass world' is revealed as a process, and the figure of the viewer comes into focus as the object of scrutiny. Given the intention of such a novel, 'Asia' – and quite specifically Bali, the island paradise which by force of synecdoche is Asia for thousands of Australian tourists – becomes quite a slippery kind of map. Rather than being the object of an ambivalent attraction which

motivates the Australian explorer to self-enlightenment, Bali here seems contemporary, culturally shifting and resistant to the Australian traveller's attempts to know it.

Tropo Man is a black comedy about the fortunes of the politically correct teacher Matt Walker who visits Bali – not as a tourist, he constantly declares – but as a traveller, a Walker of untrodden sands, a cultural connoisseur with an anthropological interest in the genuine article. Like all parody, which closely shadows the very structure it undoes, this novel follows the genre of Australian novels about Asia outlined by Broinowski. The novel begins with the scene of Matt's sweaty arrival, complete with colonial Panama hat, into surging, sucking crowds. However in this instance the crowds are constituted not by the soiled masses of Asia but by 'white bodies covering the sand in every direction. Tourists' (1). As usual, there's a mission in the wings: Matt's mission is to 'understand' Bali and in the process to understand himself, and heal the broken relationship he's left behind in Australia. (What Matt doesn't know at this stage, but what the reader suspects, is that the origin of his mission is left further behind than he thinks, since his love has already shifted her attention to someone else.) Again, there's a series of trials to be undergone. Matt's is a trial by fire, as we're constantly reminded by his dreams and hallucinations of combustion and immolation; here the novel draws upon the philosophies of a predominantly Hindu Bali (Agni is the Hindu god of fire) in order to parody Matt's dreams of being turned – quite literally – inside out by Bali. But finally one of the only two things to go up in smoke is Matt's intention to experience, indeed to absorb and contain, Bali. The other thing to go up in smoke is Matt's fellow traveller and doppelganger Frank Schmetzer, the German expatriate who has 'gone troppo' and who immolates himself near the end of the novel in mimicry of the tourist-drawing Balinese cremation ceremony. Whether this act of self-immolation is motivated by the desire to achieve the full presence of 'knowledge' which the viewers attribute to the ritual (death as *jouissance*), or whether it signifies the emptying of all meaning ('Schmetzer was dead ... in the dirt' [166]), is an ambiguity left unresolved in the text; Lee's joke is presumably that the line between full presence of meaning and empty meaning is, in this context, an indiscernible one. The discovery of Frank's body sends Matt into the country's storm-swept interior towards the scene of climax and subsequent enlightenment which is required by the Australian abroad in Asia:

This was it. He felt it with growing conviction. This was the place where he should wait. At the next flash of lightning he studied the ground but could see nothing of significance. Clods of earth cracked by the sun, a few strands of grass. But that, he realised, was how it should be. Dust to dust. ... [Then] a deep rumbling sound began in a far-off place. His legs gave way and he dropped to the ground ... and clung to the Earth. (Lee, 169-70)

But as Matt clutches a shaking earth in anticipation of enlightenment, it is only the commercial effect of a post-Enlightenment culture – an aeroplane – that comes to pass; which it does, overhead, bearing in its belly more Australian tourists to their dream destination.

It is in such a manner that 'Bali' as a signifier of cultural mysteries and spiritual revelations is emptied of meaning. In his book *Bali: A Paradise Created*,¹⁴ Adrian Vickers discusses the processes – historical, political, economic – through which Bali has been made. He traces the emergence in the 1920s and '30s of Bali as island paradise from a nineteenth century Western perception of Bali as requiring, of course, the guiding hand of European civilisation in the form of Dutch colonialism. (It is hardly surprising to note, to invoke another context, that in Australia this historical shift of perception coincided with a changing image of the Aborigines from being threatening, lazy or simply invisible to being an aesthetic resource of significant anthropological interest. The aestheticisation of Aboriginal culture, like that of Balinese culture, continues to project considerable commercial profit. The crucial difference today, of course, is that many Balinese benefit from that profit while Aboriginal people do not.) Bali-as-aesthetic-resource, Vickers argues, became an important political asset for the post-war Indonesian government's creation of a republic, and with the New Order of Suharto, economic expediencies cemented the promotion of Bali as cultural asset. In the end, then, Balinese culture has no centre of value which can be uncovered; its pre-colonial and colonial history, and later its political and economic functions for a formalised Republic, all intersect to forbid such a centre.

It is in fact a decentred Bali which Matt is always compelled to confront, despite his expectations. Each point of meaning is emptied of the significance allotted to it by the Western traveller. The artists of Ubud paint by rote in a way that the Aussie surfer Pete Burns can easily emulate; he not only emulates their art, in fact, but is then emulated by them in an ironic displacing of originality. The Balinese themselves – seemingly gentle, spiritually locked into their world and, finally, inscrutable – show their capacity to adapt to and profit from the voyeuristic desire of tourists. The artist and tourist guide Nyoman is *both* the gentle artist figure, complete with 'prehensile feet ... feet that drew an energy from the earth' (37), *and* the on-the-make entrepreneur, who likes to dress like Michael Jackson and who even has a streak of indifferent cruelty. Far from being the hapless victims of the tourist market, as Matt would have them, the Balinese are determining the growth of that market. The note of thwarted expectation which drives the novel culminates in a climactic scene of the Balinese cremation ceremony, but instead of 'Bali revealed', the image is of Matt reflected back to himself, in all his ludicrousness, through the eyes of the Troppo Man Schmetzer:

'You speak English?' he said. 'English?'

The crowd guffawed.

'Ah, Français, Parlez-vous Français?' he said slowly. 'Deutsch?' He put on a mock display of surprise each time Matt failed to respond. 'You speak Aust-ra-lian?' he drawled.

... 'Oh, comprenez, understand,' Schmetzer said, pointing to his head as if he was stupid. 'You Balinese man, yar, Balinese!' And he performed a frolic standing on the balls of his feet, his fingers twitching and his eyes bulging. Everyone was laughing uncontrollably ... (158)

In this scene the 'looking glass world' of the tourist/explorer's creation casts back his own image. He is revealed as the mirror reflection of the horizon he has set: *Tropo Man* is then not so much about the impact of tourism on Bali as it is about what tourism fails to be; that is, a window to cultural authenticity. The mocking laughter which frames Matt here signals the opposite of illumination; the scene is not of meaning achieved but of meaning emptied. This scene of Matt's exposure is indicative of the structure of the text itself, and the celebration of its own artifice is, indeed, the intention of what Graham Huggan, borrowing from Maxine Feifer, calls the 'post-tourist tourist novel'.¹⁵ Including Lee's novel in his discussion, he argues that the post-tourist tourist novel is marked by the comic, by the deflation of High Moral Seriousness, and by the postmodern consciousness of trans-cultural experience as a game, in which multiplicity – rather than authenticity – of experience is foregrounded (Huggan, 173). Finally, in its debunking of both the categories 'authentic' culture and 'universal' or global culture, Huggan attributes the post-tourist tourist novel with a post-colonial role.

However, could there be a point here at which the parodic voice of the text collides with the object of its scrutiny? As readers we are invited to reject what we recognise as Matt's Noble Savage Syndrome, but to what extent might there still be a level of regret for an irrevocably lost culture: a culture to which the traveller, in any case, can never have access? At the end of the novel Bali is still a closed book to the traveller/explorer who finally, and despite all the thwarting of expectations, does in fact 'find' what he (like his predecessors in the Australian novels identified by Broinowski) came to find: himself. In the last scene of the novel, Matt's self-delusion falls away to reveal his human frailty and here, as in those earlier texts, the consciousness revealed is that of the traveller. Might there be a point, too, at which the debunking of one myth (for instance of Nyoman as the child-like and docile Balinese) slides into the risk of compounding another (of Nyoman as the shift and unreadable Asian)? Is this parody's means to an end, or is it the end of parody? In refusing the myth of authenticity which underwrites the discourse of orientalism, might the text risk reinscribing the myth of inscrutability, which is orientalism's other face?

In a sense these are impossible questions to answer, most particularly because all oppositional or parodic narrative is intimately bound to the very structure it unsettles. Indeed it might be argued that the most unsettling parodic narrative is that which least clearly distinguishes itself from its target. But although a parodic novel like *Troppo Man* might offer a sharper and more self-critical view of Australia's encounter with 'Asia' than its predecessors (like *The Year of Living Dangerously*) could have done even a decade earlier, its ambiguities suggest that, even in an age of trans-cultural experience, Asia still figures in Australian literature, as it has always done, as a vehicle for self-scrutiny. In this decade leading up to the centenary of Federation, to recall the comments of Ashleigh Seow and Zoher Abdoolcarim, Australia might extend the consideration of its own position in the Asia Pacific region to the ways in which the other cultures in the region, and their literatures, imagine Australia.

NOTES

1. Sudesh Mishra, 'Haunted Lines: Postcolonial Theory and the Genealogy of Racial Formations in Fiji', *Meanjin* 52. 4 (1993), p. 623. I would like to thank Sudesh for his helpful discussion of some of the issues contained here.
2. Gayatri Spivak uses the term 'crisis' to signify a dynamic moment of intersecting cultural agendas. See *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York and London: Routledge, 1987), p. 103.
3. Of course this tendency may work the other way around also; individual governments in the region may even argue for the validity of legal systems and economic policies on ontological grounds of essential difference.
4. *The Weekend Australian*, November 6-7 1993.
5. Comments by Ashleigh Seow and Zoher Abdoolcarim in Richard McGregor and David Lague, 'How we Rate in Asia', *The Weekend Australian* November 6-7 (1993).
6. See, for instance, Stephen Slemon, 'Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World', *World Literature Written in English* 30. 2 (1990), pp. 30-41.
7. Christopher Koch, *The Year of Living Dangerously* (London: Grafton, 1978); Gerard Lee, *Troppo Man* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1990).
8. Alison Broinowski, *The Yellow Lady: Australian Impressions of Asia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1992). Some of the novels Broinowski discusses here are Christopher Koch's *The Year of Living Dangerously*, Glenda Adams' *Games of the Strong*, Margaret Jones' *The Smiling Buddha* and *The Confucius Enigma*, Robert Drew's *A Cry in the Jungle Bar*, Blanche D'Apulget's *Turtle Beach* and *Monkeys in the Dark*, Ian Moffit's *The Retreat of Radiance*.
9. Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 167.
10. See Helen Tiffin, 'Asia, Europe and Australian Identity: The Novels of Christopher Koch', *Australian Literary Studies* 10. 3 (1982), pp. 326-35 and 'Asia and the Contemporary Australian Novel', *Australian Literary Studies* 11. 4 (1984), pp. 468-79.
11. Helen Tiffin, 'Asia and the Contemporary Australian Novel', pp. 477-79.
12. Christopher Koch, *Crossing the Gap: A Novelist's Essays* (London: Hogarth Press, 1987), p. 134.

13. Paul Carter, *Living in a New Country: History, Travelling and Language* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), pp. 28-29.
14. Adrian Vickers, *Bali: A Paradise Created* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1989).
15. Graham Huggan, 'Some Recent Australian Fictions in the Age of Tourism', *Australian Literary Studies* 16. 2 (1993), pp. 168-178. Maxine Feifer's *Going Places* (London: Macmillan, 1985) is cited as the source of the term 'post-tourism'.

RICHARD KELLY TIPPING

Subvertising: Word Works

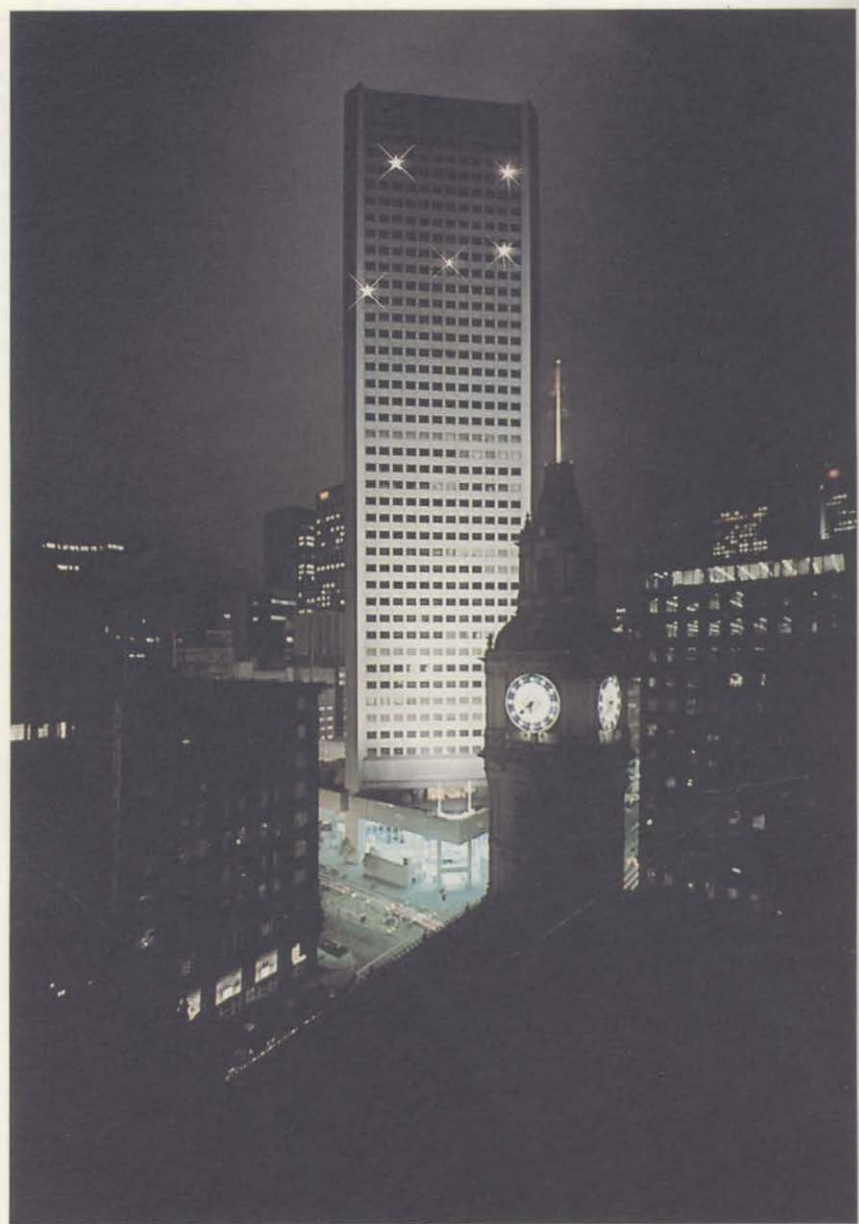
The nine *word works* included in this issue of *Kunapipi* are examples of my explorations in what is sometimes called 'visual poetry' to indicate that the way the poem is *embodied* is essential to its meaning. It is, after all, being looked at on the page, not listened to *per se*, and this provides an opportunity for the poet to ask the eye to dance, leaving the ear at the wall. My own written poetry, in contrast, is lyrical, diverse in style as well as aim, and meant to be heard, at least on the readers' inner ear if not spoken out loud. In the case of these to-be-voiced poems, line arrangement is an indication of the rhythms of oral delivery and has meaning as a kind of enforced hesitation. If you say: 'the form restricts and forms so you fit my body when we love like never any other' in the same bland monotonal run-on you might use to read someone a sentence from a technical manual, you have missed much of the poem. The linebreaks encourage rehearsing with a slower point of view. I've included 'The Poem Considered as a Lover' because it's a poem about poetry, as well as an 'illustrated poem' which (and this may confuse you) is different from a purely 'visual poem' because it can live without the picture. The conjunction does open up further formal and sensual dimensions though, I hope. As I went further into the practice of poetry, I became more and more interested in the visual dimensions of letters and typefaces taken as sculptural materials which could be shaped and spaced into the poem's essential and integral elements. A recent example is 'Heart the Earth (Hear the Art)', where a mantra-like sequence of 'readings' is opened up by the circle of four hearts, and their hearths, and so on. I have also been aware of the incessant demands of public language. By that I mean graphic language which has a bold physical presence, and which wants us to pay attention. Road-signs giving instructions or warnings; huge company logos jutting out at approaching motorists announcing fuel or fast food; and soap packet designs jostling for buyers on supermarket shelves are examples of this 'talking' whose publication methods and mass audience can only make poets envious. 'Form One Planet', for example, which is one of the Road-signed series, is a result of this interest. If letters can have sculptural dimension, then why can't the sheet of paper become the side of a building? And doesn't the Southern Cross as a key icon of Australian identity also invite recontextualisation as a means to fresh questions about overlapping cultures in the curve of spacetime? Thus, 'Southern Crossing', first enacted

with powerful lights on the Pylon of the Sydney Harbour Bridge facing the Opera House in 1982, and here shown with the 'cross' tilted away from the religiocentricity of its naming, imitating the constellation's nightly turning, placed on a prominent skyscraper in Melbourne in 1993. If the enactment of the *sign work* is largescale and temporary (such as the above) it is also true that the effective realisation of the object/idea is ultimately the page or photographic sheet, inhabiting the energy field which is created by imposing a frame and edge. Thus, we live in a published world. In 1977 I had bought my first camera (a black-bodied Olympus OM1) and begun photographing signs in the languagescape which were accidentally ironic, ambiguous, paradoxical, or simply bizarre. Many of these were collected in *Signs of Australia*, published by Penguin Australia in 1982, which quickly outsold my previous poetry books by a factor of ten. The representation of the actual and the actual representation of the invented started to get mixed up. It was more fun that way. The photograph I call 'Literary Television' is just as it used to be on one of my bookshelves at Bondi Beach in 1982. I find the joke particularly poignant because I then spent the best part of the next four years making documentary film portraits of writers for television, with varying success. These included studies of Roland Robinson, Les Murray, Peter Porter, Randolph Stow, Sumner Locke Elliott, David Malouf and Jack Lindsay. In 1988 Australia had its Bicentenary of European settlement, which was of course controversial and useful in these post-colonial and more indigenous days. 'The Australian Touch' was my contribution, published as a postcard at the time. Like 'Southern Crossing', it plays with the signification of shape (the precise abstractions of mapping which have become the country's quintessential logo, an idea of coasts) and of hand-making and marking, of belonging to. In 1989 I took up a lectureship in the Department of Communication and Media Arts at the University of Newcastle, New South Wales, and moved with my family to Wangi Wangi (pronounced 'wondji') on Lake Macquarie, about two hours by train north of Sydney. That same year I began Thorny Devil Press, which publishes limited edition foliobooks of my word works, as well as multiples in 2D and 3D. An example of a multiple is 'Caution: There Is No Avant-garde', which was released in 1993 as a yellow and black warning sign on 'corflute' plastic sheeting, 295 x 225mm in size, unnumbered and unsigned. It has appeared as the cover of Australian Art Monthly, and as a screenprint in *The Sydney Morning Volume IV*. Now it's a postcard published by Kunapipi. I like the same work appearing and reappearing in different media, materials and dimensions. Next it might become a refrigerator magnet, or a stamp, or an edition of standard specification signs using reflective tape on aluminium. The main problem might be lack of audience? Hello? We'll be right back after this short break. 'Thorny Devil Press, P.O. Box 123, Wangi Wangi, NSW 2267. Write for our catalogue.' OK, welcome back to the show. A last note about **Subvertising**. This is in bold type because it's

very heavy. It's the name I use for word works like 'New World Power' and 'Sunlight Soap Opera', which are interventions, or manipulations, in the name of art. Subvert, I sing. Not to 'ad' to, but to subtract from the omnipresent texts of advertising culture, where everything (including controversial ideas) is a product available now in *fresh, delicious, bite-sized chunks* guaranteed to last a lifetime, or your money back. Meanwhile, the mediated world is breaking up into new flows. A mobile-phone starts ringing in the cinema. A fax prints out in the livingroom. That home video is about to make international prime time TV news. SCRIPT: Roll final song. 'So what can a poet do, but to sing in a rock-roll band.' Superimpose closing titles over shots of the silly bastard boarding another plane, waving his Hi-8 Handycam, smiling as if the doors of perception had just opened.



Literary Television



Southern Crossing Melbourne, 1993

THE EARTH THE EARTH
THE EARTH THE EARTH

Business & Society, 1993



THE AUSTRALIAN TOUCH

CAUTION

**THERE IS NO
AVANT-GARDE
ONLY THOSE WHO
HAVE BEEN LEFT
BEHIND**



Roadworks, 1992

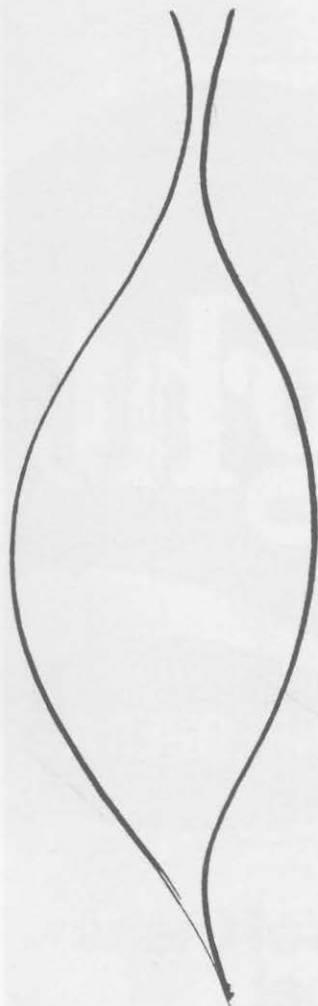
**NET WEIGHT
WHEN PACKED**

1.25 kg

Sunlight

SOAP OPERA

**Gives reality a softness
you can feel**



**THE POEM CONSIDERED
AS A LOVER**

**the form restricts
and forms, so you fit
my body when we love
like never any other**

BRUCE BENNETT

Living Spaces: Some Australian Houses of Childhood

In an age of increasing mobility, the house signifies stability. Its living spaces may seem a sanctuary, or a prison, or both at different times. Representing an achievement of men and women as makers, houses stand somewhere between the tent and the castle in the great chain of dwelling places, with aspirations generally expressed towards the latter. For at least a century, Australians have been majority suburban dwellers. Australian houses have generally been stand-alone structures, and the spaces within and between them are constituent elements in the identity of their inhabitants. There is an economics and a politics, but also a poetics of space which can be applied to housing.¹ Creative writers often negotiate the limits of the various spaces they have inhabited, especially when they attempt to re-forge the houses of their childhood.

In the history of Australian literature, the house signifies a rupture in the persistent British Victorian tradition whereby the fortunes of a family are forever stabilised and given palpable form. Henry Handel Richardson's trilogy *The Fortunes of Richard Mahony* best represents this rupture, revealing the deep instability of the protagonist in his increasingly restless buying and selling of temporary dwelling places; in this respect he never leaves behind the tents of the goldfields. For some nationalist writers of the 1890s and later, the old bark hut signifies a distinctive vernacular answer to the British aristocratic tradition. By the mid-twentieth century, when Robin Boyd was writing *The Australian Ugliness* (1952), Barry Humphries was imbibing his source material for *Moonee Ponds* and Patrick White was brewing his *Sarsaparilla*, Australian suburbia was under attack. Post-war reconstruction was seen by many Australian artists and intellectuals to be imposing a false uniformity over Australians: elements of the middle-class had turned on each other and themselves. Eric Rolls sums up a more general view of houses at this time:

Australian houses impose on the landscape. Suburban houses line up along the streets, lawns shaven, windows washed, roofs trim, doors closed, as though mustered by drill sergeants. 'Squad, atten-shun! From the right, number!' How many councillors would approve a house built back-to-front? They would fear it might fart at them.

Country houses are collections of coloured boxes dropped in paddocks. They could never have grown up out of the soil. Dwellers in them are not so much protected as parcelled up.²

The metaphors here indicate the writer's sense of the unachieved ideal of an organic relationship between house and land. Instead, houses have become merely commercial products. More ludicrously, they mimic the uniform attitudes of armed forces in a war which has not been left entirely behind. A more ambiguous set of attitudes is conveyed in Randolph Stow's novel *The Merry-Go-Round in the Sea* (1965), in which Hugh Mackay's postwar assimilation into suburbia is presented as a working-class desire for comfort and security and as a cop-out by his wartime mate Rick Maplestead, whose restlessness reflects that of many artists and intellectuals in the post-war years.

The suburbs and their houses had their strongest apologists in the 1970s including Hugh Stretton, Donald Horne and Craig McGregor. One result of their persuasive revaluations has been a more receptive audience for serious literary accounts of childhoods in 'ordinary' suburbs and country towns. Above all, the Australian house could be seen to play a legitimate part in the shaping of individual lives. In this context, the destruction of a house may seem a desecration of memory and identity. Hence one of the most representatively shocking scenes in contemporary Australian writing is the calculated burning-down of a house in Frank Moorhouse's discontinuous narrative, *The Electrical Experience*.³ Moorhouse's protagonist, George McDowell, a figure based on the prototypical male of the author's father's generation, is named as an executor of an old friend's will in the New South Wales south coast country town where the narrative is set. He is given the task of burning down the house; it is a test of his will that he should carry through this commission from his dead friend in the face of opposition from the town. Moorhouse's graphic rendition of the event demonstrates his awareness of its significance not only for the individuals concerned but also as a symptomatic cultural event. McDowell's determined drenching with kerosene of furniture, books, paintings and even stamp albums is seen by him as a test of his own 'character' and determination. When the conflagration occurs, no trace is left of his former friend's family who had lived in the town since it had been incorporated as a municipality. The objects of memory, of a history, are obliterated. In the context of Moorhouse's later writings, the burning of the house has a deeply ambiguous set of significations: the writer's fascination with motels, pizzerias, rented cars and airports as vehicles of urban anonymity and mobility reinforce his sense of the passing of an age of the family house as repository of history in the postmodern age. However, Moorhouse's alter egos recurrently resist the erasure of memory and history and are snubbed by the Balmain bourgeoisie, among others, for doing so. Ejected from a fashionable commune in Balmain, a Moorhouse alter ego

plaintively asks: 'Is there a commune for people who do not fit very well into communes?'⁴

In spite of the pressures of post-modernity, the living spaces of houses remain a potent area of investigation for many Australian writers, especially in their exploration of identity formation in early childhood (an area into which Moorhouse has not yet ventured). A recurrent site of such investigations is the verandah or its later variant, the sleepout. Fiona Giles's collection of stories by nineteenth century Australian women, *From the Verandah*, takes its title from Ethel Mills: 'She liked to see what was going on; and she said that in Australia most things happened on verandahs.'⁵ In one of the jargons of today, the verandah is 'liminal space', a threshold to the outdoors world of men, the outback or adventure.

In late twentieth century fiction and autobiography too, the outer reaches of the suburban house are often represented by the verandah and sometimes the enclosed verandah as sleepout. David Malouf's *12 Edmonstone Street* is a small classic in the exploration of identity through re-creation in memory of the child's spatial relationship to the South Brisbane house in which he was brought up.⁶ His recreated memory of the verandah, where he and his sister slept in home-made cots is recalled as being 'beyond our parents' bedroom window, where we are in easy reach':

The verandah is closed on that side by a fernery, or, as I see it, opens on that side into it. Diagonal slabs of unpainted timber gone grey with age are hung with stag horns, elk horns, orchids that sprout from fleshy knobs, and shaggy wire baskets of hare's foot and maidenhair. The ground is all sword-ferns round a pond with three opulent gold fish. Behind it is a kind of grotto made of pinkish-grey concrete, a dozen scaly branches of which, eaten raw in places, droop and tangle like the arms, half-petrified, half-rotting, of a stranded sea-monster. (p. 19)

The underlying drama here is of separation from parents; its keynote is fear. In retrospect, more calmly, the author sees verandahs as 'no-man's-land, border zones that keep contact with the house and its activities on one face but are open on the other to the street, the night and all the vast, unknown areas beyond' (p. 20). Malouf recreates the child as father of the man when he represents him rejecting the cot and refusing to stay there, becoming 'a night wanderer, a rebel nomad trailing my blanket through the house to my favourite camping places' (p. 20). In summary, he sees a mixed pattern of inside-outside in these early, deeply-etched memories: 'Perhaps it is this daily experience of being cast out and then let in again that has made the house and all its rooms so precious to me. Each morning I step across the threshold and there it is, a world recovered, restored' (p. 21).

This reconstruction by David Malouf in his early fifties of his pre-war childhood house is selective, as all such accounts are; it explores the interiors and verandahs of the old Queenslander house of his early childhood but chooses to exclude the brick house to which his upwardly

mobile father from a Lebanese family moved in 1947 when Malouf was thirteen. By contrast with 12 Edmonstone Street, the brick house seems 'stuffily and pretentiously over-furnished and depressingly modern'.⁷ Another Brisbane-born writer, Peter Porter, has explored his childhood and youth in relation to a weatherboard house on stilts in Annerley, which he recalls as part of 'shabby genteel' Australia:

We were on the Ipswich Road, an unlovely ribbon of shops, factories and hospitals winding out of Brisbane on the south side of the river ... Imagine a primitive interpretation of Le Corbusier's ideas, carried out in wood and painted in garish or depressing colours. Our house was only about five feet off the ground in front, but at least fifteen at the back, the ground sloped so steeply. It was mounted on wooden piles, each topped with a metal hat and coated in creosote to deter the white ants.⁸

This house has a schizophrenic history for Porter. Before his mother's sudden death when he was nine, the house opens out to a garden which offered Porter, in retrospect, a prospect of an Australian Eden, with his father gardening and his mother on the back landing shouting the names of horses she wanted to back to the woman next door who would then ring them through to the SP bookmaker.⁹ After her death his self-image is of being cast down and out, retreating to the under-the-house region to solitary, joyless masturbation. Later, as an expatriate in London he lives in basement flats, seeing the city from below, critical of the moneyed élites, a world he transcends in the gods at the opera. In misery, and disappointment, especially, houses and flats share his gloom; gardens are where love and occasional hope are found.

One of the most common characteristics of Australian literary houses is their fragile insubstantiality. Perhaps this is the cue for memory to recuperate them. Like Malouf's and Porter's wooden houses in Brisbane, Dorothy Hewett's and Les Murray's childhood farmhouses in the country are of weatherboard and iron. Of these, Hewett's is presented as more poignantly idyllic because she has left it behind. At the end of her autobiography *Wild Card* she recounts a final return visit to the abandoned house in a denuded landscape near Wickepin in South-West Australia. The sense of loss is expressed in her vision of the trees:

Two almonds, a few figs and one quince had survived. No she-oaks, no wattles, no tea-tree, no paperbarks, no bottlebrush, no salmon-gums, no stables or sheds or post and rail sheep yards, only the concrete dip left like a scar in the home paddock, littered with iron and rusty machinery.¹⁰

There is no need for Hewett to come back again because the 'real' house of childhood remains. There is no need because, in Hewett's words, 'in the Dream Girl's Garden, in Golden Valley, in the districts of Jarrabin and Muckinupin, the first house lies secure in the hollow of the heart'.¹¹

The task of recuperation is made both easier and more difficult for Les Murray by his return to live, with his family, adjacent to the 'weather-board cathedral' of his childhood near Bunyah, in New South Wales. Romantic loss is thus tempered by realism. Yet childhood remains a recurrent source of inspiration. His poem 'The Sleepout' locates it precisely: 'Childhood sleeps in a verandah room in an iron bed close to the wall.'¹² Unlike Malouf's ambivalent inward-outward aspect in his sleepout in Brisbane, the defining characteristic of Murray's sleepout here is its predominant access to the outdoors, and to the broad freedoms of imagination:

Inside the forest was lamplit
along tracks to a starry creek bed
and beyond lay the never-fenced country,
its full billabongs all surrounded

by animals and birds, in loud crustings,
and something kept leaping up amongst them.
And out there, to kindle whenever
dark found it, hung the daylight moon.

The magic evoked here is expressed as a quality of child-like vision but is stimulated by the architectonics of the common 'sleepout', where access to dreams is a mode of extroversion.

Real estate agents still try to sell buyers their notion of the 'dream house'. Tim Winton has distinguished between houses one can live in and those of which one can dream:

Like most Australians I have spent much of my life in the suburbs. I was raised in the Perth suburb of Karrinyup. A quarter acre, a terracotta roof, a facade knocked out by some bored government architect, a Hills Hoist in the backyard and picket fences between us and the neighbours. It was the sixties and the street was full of young families, State Housing applicants, migrants from Holland and Yugoslavia and the English north – foot soldiers of the great sprawl trying to make our way in the raw diagram of streets we slowly filled to make a new neighbourhood. I lived there happily for twelve years but I do not dream of that house.¹³

Instead, he dreams of the Christmas holiday shack at the mouth of the Greenough River, south of Geraldton. For Winton, the house offers a retreat from the heavy afternoon winds to reading spaces on bunk beds within, but its chief quality is its access to the outdoors, to the sea:

From the front windows you could see out beyond the eyelid of the verandah to the bright limestone road and the rivermouth. Out there, the sand was packed hard and cars could be driven across between river and sea. The surf hammered night and day, never calm, never quietly, blue all the way to Africa.¹⁴

This emergent 'Australian' pattern of childhood houses which offer access to a vivid natural world outdoors is reinforced in the autobiographical reminiscences of Aboriginal writers Jack Davis and Sally Morgan. Davis's childhood house in the 1920s is a 'tiny weatherboard and galvanized iron hut' near Yarloop in South-Western Australia, which his father has enlarged to accommodate eleven children.¹⁵ The boy's living spaces are of necessity in the bush outside the hut, where he is at home with brothers, sisters and friends and a variety of pets including possums, magpies, wild piglets, ducks and bobtail goannas. Early childhood adventures in these spaces represent in Davis's narrative a happy prelude to his tragic separation from family and home when he is sent to the prison-like Moore River Native Settlement.¹⁶ In Sally Morgan's account of growing up in suburban Perth in the 1950s¹⁷ class differences and poverty as well as racial difference are evident. Her family's small, cramped State Housing Commission house is located in working-class Manning which differs from neighbouring Como, Sally realises, when she compares her school lunches of jam and Vegemite sandwiches with the Como kids' salad lunches in plastic containers. While her alcoholic, war-injured father is alive, he commandeers the sleepout and back verandah and the house seems 'menacing' and 'surrounded by all kinds of eerie shadows' (p. 42). After his death she finds comfort and security in the kitchen and the lounge-room where the open fire is stoked and rough beds are made up in the lounge-room. Thereafter, too, she and her sisters venture into the suburban bushland and swamp, adding a variety of pets to the household but (a generation later than Davis and in the more ecologically trained suburbs) returning goannas, tadpoles, frogs, gilgies and other wildlife to the bush. The dynamics of such domestic movements and their human significance deserve further investigation, in such autobiographies as in prose fiction.

It is clear that houses such as the above have become imaginatively alive to those who have inhabited them. Unlike the traditional European novel, these houses do not offer images of wealth or power. Nor do they offer the aesthetic qualities of 'charm'. Their association with childhood however makes them vehicles for the establishment of an aesthetic of innocence, where interior spaces are enlarged as signifiers of identity and the free spirit is drawn outwards to the natural world. With a different emphasis, the *politics* of houses and their inhabitants are explored in inner-urban environments by other writers such as Christina Stead and Helen Garner. Frank Moorhouse explores with a country boy's fascination the possibilities of freedom and independence in inner-city spaces, from private pads to communes. But the representation of houses of innocence in childhood which open onto a natural world remains perhaps the strongest imaginative compulsion in Australian literature.

A major challenge evoked by the literary texts I have discussed briefly here is to link their representations of living spaces with those of human sciences such as anthropology, architecture and human geography.

Clifford Geertz's anthropological emphasis on localism and 'thick description' points in the direction of a deeper awareness of local (including domestic) living spaces.¹⁸ A growing interest is evident among students of architecture in the socio-cultural factors in domestic space and their implications for design practice. For example, Londoners Julienne Hanson and Bill Hillier have used planning documents and literary texts to hypothesize that 'the order which exists in the interior of a dwelling, and the way in which that interior is related to the exterior, are predominantly related to social relations'.¹⁹ This analysis depends on British concepts of class and emphasizes relationship to the street rather than to backyard, garden, beach or bush as in most of the Australian examples I have cited. Interdisciplinary research on urban renewal at the Australian National University brings together architects, town planners, cultural geographers, heritage workers, public historians and others to questions of the value and significance of living spaces.²⁰ Much more serious attention should be given elsewhere to such investigations. If the spaces we construct and live in inform our value-systems and imaginings, as many Australian literary texts indicate they do, these texts should form an important part of such cooperative investigation and research.

NOTES

1. See Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958). For an Australian application see Elizabeth Ferrier, 'From Pleasure Domes to Bark Huts: Architectural Metaphors in Recent Australian Fiction', *Australian Literary Studies*, 13, 1, May 1987, pp. 40-53.
2. Eric Rolls, *Celebration of the Senses* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1985), p. 142.
3. Frank Moorhouse, *The Electrical Experience: A Discontinuous Narrative* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1974).
4. Frank Moorhouse, 'The Commune Does Not Want You', *Tales of Mystery and Romance* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1977), pp. 134-141.
5. Fiona Giles, ed., *From the Verandah: Stories of Love and Landscape by Nineteenth Century Australian Women* (McPhee Gribble/Penguin, 1987).
6. David Malouf, *12 Edmonstone Street* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985). For further discussion see Martin Leer, 'At the Edge: Geography and the Imagination in the Work of David Malouf', *Australian Literary Studies*, 12, 1, May 1985, pp. 3-21.
7. David Malouf, *Johnno* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 4.
8. Bruce Bennett, *Spirit in Exile: Peter Porter and his Poetry* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 31.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
10. Dorothy Hewett, *Wild Card: An Autobiography 1923-1958* (McPhee Gribble/Penguin, 1990), p. 271.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 273.
12. Les A. Murray, *The Daylight Moon* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1988), p. 18.
13. Tim Winton, *Land's Edge* (Sydney: Pan MacMillan Australia, 1993), p. 8.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

15. Jack Davis, *A Boy's Life* (Broome: Magabala Books, 1991), p. 8.
16. Keith Chesson, *Jack Davis: A Life-Story* (Melbourne: Dent, 1988), Ch. 2.
17. Sally Morgan, *My Place* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1987).
18. See Clifford Geertz, 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture', *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973). The idea of localism as a site of knowledge is further developed in *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).
19. Julienne Hanson and Bill Hillier, 'Domestic Space Organization: Two Contemporary Space-Codes Compared', *Architecture and Behaviour*, 2 (1982), pp. 5-25.
20. The Urban Research Program at the Research School of Social Sciences, under the direction of Professor Patrick Troy, holds regular seminars on these topics at the Australian National University, Canberra.

AMIN MALAK

'The World Is Your People': *The Time of the Peacock* and the Evolution of an Australian Identity

To Doireann MacDermott I owe the pleasure of being introduced to Mena Abdullah and Ray Mathew's engaging collection of stories, *The Time of the Peacock*.¹ She gave a sympathetic reading to the book at a session of the 1988 EACLALS conference in Nice, and due to my interest in the discourse of Muslim fiction in English, her paper prompted me to examine the text. My article here represents a sequel to Doireann MacDermott's informative discussion that appeared in the conference's proceedings.²

The Time of the Peacock contains twelve stories, eleven of which are set in rural Australia, while the last one, 'A Long Way', takes place in rural Pakistan. While most 'third-world' immigrant writers in developed countries deal with urban issues, it is particularly fascinating to read such an intimate portrayal of rural experiences.³ These simple, sequential yet subtle and interlocked stories project the perspectives of Indian Muslims who originally arrived in rural Australia in the second half of the last century; their initial job was to train camels across the wilderness, settling afterwards as farmers. During the era of The White Australia Policy, these Indian Muslims were curiously referred to as 'Afghans' stereotyping 'all who wore turbans, exotic attire and shared the Moslem [sic] faith, quite irrespective of their diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds'.⁴

These interlinked stories, in which characters from one family often reappear in different episodes, are given focus by the maturing voice of its sensitive, observant narrator, Nimmi. Her endearing energy, imagination, and inquisitiveness – for which she is teasingly labelled 'the questioner' (p. 5) and 'the dreamy one' (p. 11) – propels the narrative forward. Significantly, Nimmi affirms precisely and distinctively her ethnicity: 'I, young as I was, could see the whole of my life as strange – a dark girl in a white man's country, a Punjabi Muslim in a Christian land' (p. 21). This stark statement lends credence to the notion that one's ethnicity does not refer 'to a thing-in-itself but to a relationship ... typically based on *contrast*',⁵ which is here distinguished on the basis of colour, gender, national origin, and religion, with the latter receiving a somewhat accentuated emphasis in the collection as a whole.

Throughout, the contrast manifests itself in terms of us and them, and in terms of what is judged to be properly Muslim as distinct from what is perceived to be typically Australian. In order to preserve their cultural values and practices, the Indian Muslims resort to the defensive attitude of constructing family-centred cocoons whereby they inhabit an approximation of life in India. To overcome their alienation, they develop a special affiliation with the landscape by inventing a semblance of India. Nimmi's mother creates a garden of Indian flowers as 'her own little walled-in country' (p. 2). This symbolic attachment to the new/old land is enhanced by a corresponding intimacy with the animals that are given dignified Indian names or referred to in familial or endearing terms: the eagle is a 'High Maharajah' (p. 53); the vixen is Kumari, a princess; Shah-Jehan, the peacock, is Nimmi's 'little brother' (p. 7); the imaginary, wise tiger is 'Grandfather Tiger'; and the little bird 'Russilla' is 'a friend, from heaven' (p. 13). Marginalized as they are, the Indian Muslims find the animals friendlier and the landscape more hospitable than some of the Australians who call them 'Niggers' (in 'Because of the Russilla') and mock their dress and food (in 'Grandfather Tiger').

As a parallel to these occasional instances of racism, the narrative, significantly, highlights acts of affection and solidarity on the part of other Australians who befriend the Indians, respect their religion, and make them feel 'like relations' (p. 19). Interestingly, in 'The Singing Man' the narrative commingles the Indians' nostalgia for their Kashmir or Punjab with the yearnings of the wandering Irish accountant, Paddy-the-Drunk, singing and pining for the green meadows of Ireland. Likewise, the counter-poising of the narrative about the Australian 'bushranger' Thunderbolt with that of the Punjabi 'dacoit' Malik Khan (through the technique of story-within-story in 'The Outlaw') signals similarities in honourable codes of conduct among people of all races, even among those who are compelled to resort to the extremes of violence.

More importantly, the narrative foregrounds the diversity in the response of the Indian Muslims to their 'foreignness' in Australia, problemizing in the process the lack of uniformity in the manner of their affirmation of ethnicity. In 'The Child that Wins', we witness a range of attitudes with regard to Hussein and Anne's marriage. Hussein's father, supported by Nimmi's favourite, comic-relief-figure Uncle Seyid – not a relative, but her father's close friend – opposes it. The father worries (perhaps too presciently) that the children of a cross-ethnic marriage 'belong nowhere' (p. 74), neither Indians, Muslims, nor Australians; the well-meaning traditionalist Uncle Seyid believes that a Muslim should marry only someone from his faith because 'your own is your own' (p. 74) and 'what was right was right forever, and that what was Muslim was always right' (p. 73). On the other hand, Nimmi's parents, whose own marriage symbolizes a striking, syncretic marriage of a Muslim to a Brahmin, give a cautious, tacit endorsement to the marriage. Their attitude reflects a certain sophisticated,

reconciliatory idealism rooted in Nimmi's mother's vague principle that 'people are people' and in Nimmi's father's declaration that 'If you stay anywhere long enough ... people get used to you. They take you in to their houses and their ways' (p. 74). Of course, Hussein's action signifies, alternatively, a readiness for organic integration justified by both genuine bonding and pragmatism. The conflict is resolved through cleverly confluencing these diverse streams with the birth of a baby, heralding hope and harmony.

'The Child that Wins' underscores the necessity to change and adapt to the realities and exigencies of immigration. While the discourse reveals an obvious pride in the characters' sense of their ethnicity and empathy for their *angst* over losing it in an alien, at times hostile, culture, a centrifugal tendency simultaneously emerges amongst them pointing towards merging with the new culture without necessarily deracinating themselves. This issue becomes prominent when the education of children – the new generation of Australian-born Muslims – is concerned. In 'The Babu from Bengal' the foresighted Wali Husson urges his friends to send their children to Australian schools to learn and to integrate into their new society, so as to spare the parents the exploitation of the Babu, a half-literate conniving clerk:

The white people send their children to school. We send ours to work in the paddocks. The white children are learning to choose. Ours are learning to be farmers, peasants, people the Babu can use to make money from. This is because their fathers are stubborn and dislike change. (p. 89)

What is being articulated here is not merely a strategy for survival, but a genuine willingness to meet the other and to emulate qualities that the Muslims can comprehend and relate to such as the pursuit of learning. The narrative affirms throughout this spirit of change by foregrounding compromise and acceptance of their new identity as Australians while cherishing their Indian heritage: the triple sets of binary oppositions along the axes of time, space and ethnic barriers (then/now, there/here, and us/them) are thus deftly defused and reconciled through such statements as 'The old ways were good, but the new ways are better' (p. 104). Similarly, in the story 'High Maharajah', the gravid act of reconstructing a damaged kite, from Indian bamboo reed and Australian paper (potent symbols for cultural roots and acquired identity) making the hybridized 'Australian kite sing' (p. 57), signals the evolvment of a new composite personality, expressing 'a distinctively Asian-Australian sensibility that is part of Australia's history'.⁶ Accordingly, the discourse of *The Time of the Peacock* functions, to extend Edward Said's musical metaphor, 'contrapuntally';⁷ it suggests, perhaps a little idyllically, that compromise is quite possible when exercising flexibility and foresight. Significantly, one can see that all the concessions are one-sided: the minority has to be accommodative of the majority.

The ethos of tolerance and compassion culminate in the last story 'A Long Way'. Evoking in the reader's mind Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, the story operates allegorically through the metaphor of an arduous journey undertaken by a Pakistani mother determined to send a jumper she has made for a son who studies in Australia; as she tries to arrive in Karachi on time to hand-deliver it to a friend departing for Australia, this Muslim mother meets believers from other religions (Hindus, untouchables, and a Christian priest) who all show her affection and admiration. Like a carefully-conceived allegory, the story, and with it the whole collection, concludes almost didactically by building up towards the book's central statement that appears in the last page: 'the world is all our people' (p. 112); this all-embracing insight confirms Nimmi's innocently pastoral vision of a child, articulated in the book's first sentence, 'the world was our farm and we were all loved.'

Deflecting confrontational conditions, the ambience of universal *détente* that permeates *The Time of the Peacock* makes it, as one Australian reviewer for the *Bulletin* aptly affirmed, 'that kind of book: to be passed on within a family, with love.'⁸ The book's fascinating thematics thus progresses from the 'dissociative sense'⁹ that emphasizes ethnic distinctiveness being jealously guarded in a daunting environment of immigration/exile towards an integrative ethos that embraces and celebrates a caring, compassionate humanity: as Rashida, Nimmi's mature sister and one of the book's privileged voices, insightfully declares: 'In all things beautiful Allah smiles' (p. 27).

NOTES

1. *The Time of the Peacock*. Stories by Mena Abdullah and Ray Mathew (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1965). Subsequent references are included in the text.
2. 'The Time of the Peacock: Indian Rural Life in Australia', in Jacqueline Bardolph, ed., *Short Fiction in the New Literatures in English* (Nice: Faculté des Lettres, 1989), pp. 203-09.
3. This reference to 'third-world' immigrant writers relates to Mena Abdullah. Since this collection of stories is of a joint authorship, it is hard to specify the role of each author in the construction of the work. One can venture an assumption based on the textual, semi-autobiographical content that the narrative material came from Mena Abdullah, while the writing was mostly done in collaboration with Ray Mathew. See also Yasmine Gooneratne 'Mena Abdullah, Australian Writer' in Sneja Gunew and Kateryna O. Longley, eds., *Striking Chords: Multicultural literary interpretations* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1992), p. 115. However, Gooneratne and two other critics deal with *The Time of the Peacock* as if it were almost exclusively written by Mena Abdullah: J.S. Ryan 'The Short Stories of Mena Abdullah', *The Literary Criterion* Vol. VI, No. 4 (Summer 1965), pp. 73-77; and Diana Brydon 'Discovering "Ethnicity": Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* and Mena Abdullah's *Time of the Peacock*', in Russell McDougall and Gillian Witlock, eds., *Australian/Canadian Literatures in English: Comparative Perspectives* (Melbourne: Methuen Australia, 1987), pp. 94-107.

4. MacDermott, op. cit., p. 203.
5. Werner Sollors 'Ethnicity', in Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin, eds., *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (Chicago and London: U. of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 288.
6. Gooneratne, op. cit., p. 118.
7. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), pp. 66-67.
8. Maurice Shadbolt, quoted in Gooneratne, op. cit., p. 115.
9. Sollors, op. cit., p. 288.

Julian Croft

THE CONSOLATION OF POETRY (for Doireann MacDermott)

Deep in the rainforest the lyre bird
does two things: scratches in soil
and sings, mimics what it heard,
finds worms and songs, all the spoil

of a world which runs two ways
one down to ruin and rot, the other up
to the sun with words of praise
remembered hymns, and some made up

like flowers offering pollened bells
from creeper roots deep in dead silence.
I know from familiar smells
the farm cat's here as well, its violence,

like our own, a trace of emerald feathers
down the track. No matter what is tried,
the lazy assassin in all weathers
lies in wait for the earth-bound singing tribe,

our only consolation the songs we learned,
and the few we made up out of dirt.
I woke this morning, the forest burned,
the dream black, and the cat curled in my shirt.

Ouyang Yu

SONG FOR AN EXILE IN AUSTRALIA

in a loveless season in Australia
the body is passing through the sun of spring
decaying gradually disconnected with life
so I cover up every face of clocks
to forget time
to forget every face that lifts up from under the white shroud of
corpses

the spring has lost its power of medium
and the body can't understand its own meaning
woodenly I wait for the coming of dusk
knowing very well that nothing will come out of it
like every disappearing season
that will not leave her shadows

in a poemless season in Australia
I read my poems of past
like a stranger in hundreds of years
reading books left to him by his ancestors
I see thousands of lines
shoot past the edge of dreams
but my paralysed brain can't pull itself out of the wheel-chair of
imagination
like my decayed body

in a riverless season in Australia
the boundless grass land drives me crazy
for my skin is thirsty for the baptism of murky rivers
and my train of thoughts is chasing waves that can rush a
thousand miles a second
listen the lawn-mower next door starts its routine again
cutting hair for the spring mourning for the season
hoping to find a fault in the ground
where there is a fault there is life running

in a season without languages in Australia
I have lost my weight in undeveloped no-person's land

like a wild devil roaming
 I sow my language into the alien soil
 where it sends forth such strange flowers that no one recognizes
 and all of a sudden I find my tongue
 held between two languages like a vice

in a season of self-exile in Australia
 I feel doubly alienated doubly illusioned
 the death of the old world has such weird attractions
 while the light of the new world has somehow darkened

in a season without love in Australia
 my body my poetry
 in a season without languages in Australia
 my interference my waves of electricity
 in a season without death in Australia
 I see the black cat acquiring an eternal existence in the afternoon
 sun
 and I see the reflection of a car above the distant trees

in a season without imagination
 in a desireless season
 in Australia
 in Australia

in Australia

FEET

all they've learnt for the last five thousand years
 is love their women's feet
 and put these in a tiny tiny pair of shoes
 so that they become so weightless that they can dance on the golden
 lotus
 leaves like the dewy stuff that rolls about in a quicksilver way

emperors loved that
 didn't you know that one emperor in tang dynasty
 asked one of his imperial concubines to do a dancing on a lotus leaf
 so light did he feel himself he fucked her then and there on the

leaf

while all the others were cowering under the enormous canopy
that shivered in quicksilver pleasure

there are other stories

men of letters used to have drinking parties with courtesans of the
town

usually with the tiniest feet

they would take off the cloth shoe that had flowers sown on it
as pointed as the girls' nipples

and smell it inside and out and caress it like you do to a health ball
the shoe went the round

and served the purpose of a cup for them to drink with

i wonder who was taking care of the shoeless feet meanwhile

that must have been hanging there quite lonesome

more importantly when they actually started doing that sort of thing
what they did with those feet

took them in hand and held them in position before you

entered in between

the energy the nourishment the vitality that should have been in the
feet

must have been all pressed further back into that particular place
that all men loved

those were the thoughts that flashed through my mind when i was
composing this feet poem

they reminded me of an incident not so long ago

when i had a photo of a group of chinese prostitutes in the first decade
of

this century

with such tiny feet

that i did not know what i was doing

but simply took out my thing and came instantly

shooting desires of a collective unconscious all over the photo

smearing the feet oh what fuckable feet

even today love for us does not start from eyes

but from feet look at those lascivious chinaman

watching feet big feet moving around

in high heels always high heels

their version of our lotus

but feet are strange things

whence they are allowed out about

they have fewer places to play

constricted they help you and me
end up inevitably in the one and same place
oh feet

MAKING LOVE MAKING POETRY

love is coming
when poetry is coming

one in tentative strides
and the other on mental tiptoes

you take things off
you put things in

your mind gone on a different track
assisted by ears and a close-eyed world

the crab-apples dripping heavily onto the senseless ground
with every gust of wind of desire

the cockatoos once more swooping down
to snatch the ripe half-yellow half-red apricots

that hung densely on the hair of two heads
that merge into one with physical concentration

the minute you seize a pen
as you reluctantly withdraw from the battleground of wrestling

your poetry is gone
with your ears

STEVEN HEIGHTON

Downing's Fast

Love of knowledge is a hunger for life.
Daily bread is no answer.

— Ralph Downing, from *The Early Essays*

1

Somewhere out beyond
all ideas
of right doing
& wrong doing
there is a field—

I'll meet you there

Years after first reading these lines of a long-dead Anatolian poet — reading them through tear-startled eyes — Ralph Downing started out toward the office for the last time. He was now what he had once referred to as *another fairly routine man, noosed in necktie and four-piece grey flannel strait-jacket, his schedule a five-day forty-hour malaise beginning each morning at nine sharp*. Though those mornings could hardly be called beginnings. They were points on the wheel. For years Ralph Downing's activities had clocked an almost unbroken circle, though he did enjoy a brief respite each Christmas (which he usually spent at home) and a month-long summer holiday (when he liked to vacation in the Thousand Islands).

His month-long summer holiday was due to increase by a week in another year, and by another week five years after that.

The office that wolfed down such a large proportion of the pie-graph of Downing's life was the Canadian administrative branch of a large international firm. This firm specialized in the manufacture of ovens, toasters, food processors, blenders, crockpots, garberators, battery-powered rolling-pins, dinner-roll warming-bins, microwaves and myriad other domestic indispensables, all ideal for the working woman. (Downing was responsible for promoting its newest devices throughout Canada.)

Although divorced, Downing was a decent family man; his ex-wife lived in a distant city with their daughters but he visited whenever he could, taking the girls for occasional weekends and nearly a week every Christmas. His alimony and child support payments were received punctually and often found to be more valuable than officially required – especially around birthdays and holidays. Although Downing had had a few insignificant flings since the divorce (and, to be honest, before it) his relationship with his ex-wife remained amicable, and over an after-office pint or two he could boast to colleagues (most of whom were also divorced) that Penelope was one of his ‘very closest friends’. The boys’d drink to that. But Downing would shake his balding head and slap assorted sharkskin shoulders with affable finality if another round were proposed, for since those first, subversive stabs of angina and his doctor’s warnings, he had become more moderate, cautious.

Not much of a story to begin with. Common enough though, even universal in some ways. Lay away the pin-striped suit (Downing’s suit was actually herringboned, cut tastefully in a subdued expensive grey), cancel the polished shoes and brand-new briefcase webbed delicately and smelling sumptuous as the interior of a new car – write these off and suppose a wide-brimmed straw hat, loose linen trousers or skirts and sunburnt shoulders and you find yourself among thousands of dark labourers, stooped in a flooded network of ricefields – cornfields, milletfields, canefields – you find red-jawed fishermen in ice-rimed slickers, forearms ridged and thick as anchor-rope heaving in nets full of slithering fish. Their hours vary (and their powers, man, their powers) but they work a set circumference of time, a set locus of soil or saltwater, and there is no escaping the gleaming nets and the steel-silver millions thriving onto the deck and dying, or the table in a hut by the paddies where a candle lights a simple meal of rice, some fish with spices, the bed where you’ll lapse exhausted for eight brief hours till hushed voices wake you to a simple meal of rice, some fish with spices, and the path *somewhere out beyond* back into a network of steaming paddies....

Always the need for a full plate, though it has never been enough. Always the need for a bamboo mat or a hammock and something to summon you out of it at dawn. In the mountains of Anatolia they tell the story of a farmer who one morning refused to get out of bed: the farmer, feeling he needed a break from the immemorial routine, announced that he was tired and could no longer work; he expected to be waited on till he was ready to return to the fields, and his family, fearing he was gravely ill, were methodically compliant. They brought him nourishing meals of goat and fresh river-trout and barley-bread, they offered up great tumblers of wine, lager and *raki*. And yet, oddly, he began to lose weight. The anxious wife insisted he eat an extra meal daily and the puzzled farmer, who actually felt fine and could not understand the weight loss, readily agreed. Soon he was eating more than his wife and husky sons together

and still he went on dwindling. He ate a whole roast spitted lamb crammed with garlic and peppered figs, yet almost overnight his arms grew thin and brittle as the walking stick he was now forced to use on the rare occasions when he did rise. He wolfed down numberless loaves of barley-bread and pillar-like stacks of pita: his ribs bulged out through his skin like steel hoops on a rotten cask. And his usually ascetic sexual appetites had grown abruptly omnivorous; his wife, toiling to satisfy his needs, began to look as dazed and gnawed-down as did he. Finally, in the midst of a vast casserole which the whole family had helped prepare and was now watching him dispatch, the sprig-thin farmer sagged back into his pillows, raised one thin arm, belched operatically, and expired.

Unhappily the Anatolian peasants who handed down this remarkable fable append no moral for our edification. Even Professor Sarah Dawkins, from whom Downing first heard it during his undergraduate years, refused to draw any drift-net conclusions. Modern medical science could no doubt offer a resonant term, a sturdy diagnosis of the farmer's disorder, but surely it is more tempting to see it as somehow metaphorical. Is the tale chiefly didactic, a piece of feudal propaganda designed to keep the peasants in the fields? Or perhaps the Sunday offering of a priest cautioning his horny flock against sensual excess? For a part of us is always asking would there ever be enough. The forty hour work week (or fifty, or sixty) effectively insulates the self from the senses – from the real life we're too ground down to lead. Or too afraid. Or, for a man like Ralph, too numbed:

Monday saves us. Tuesday is an excuse. Wednesday is the week's fulcrum, tottering with chores. Saturday and Sunday are carrots that reward us and carbo-load us for the coming week, and the morning after, another Monday, is unpleasant but at least not very real. And if one Monday you refused to get up and were promised all you could eat....

But Downing would not have done anything like that – at any rate not after his chaotic, often unhappy days as a student. And he never did get around to asking his doctor-friend Hans what kind of disease could have prompted such outlandish symptoms. Over their after-office pint Hans would have drawn on his pipe and speculated. He should certainly have come up with something.

2

BETTER HOMES AND GARDENS' 'NEWFANGLED' QUICK-BREAD

- 3 cups white flour
- 1 cup 'one-minute' oats
- 1 tbsp. baking soda
- 1 cup 'fresh' milk (or use powdered milk) soured with vinegar (or use buttermilk)
- 2 eggs (or use instant egg powder)
- Half-cup white sugar (or use saccharine, aspartame, honey, or other substitute)

In a large bowl mix the flour, oats and sugar together, then add the soda. In another bowl combine the soured milk and egg. Mix all the ingredients and fold together till you have a thick paste. Briefly knead paste on a bread-board (or use DoughMaster EasyKnead Electric Kneader) and place in the microwave for 90 seconds. Eat immediately.

3

'But even the seasons are temporary: the cycles we consider most permanent are, like those we invent for ourselves, subject to change...' (At this point I looked up and saw that only Ralph Downing was listening to me, taking notes. *Somewhere*, I thought, *out beyond all ideas...*) 'During the last ice age, then, the summer our distant ancestors conceived, in their inarticulate way, as predestined and perennial finally failed one year to arrive. Ugh, they must have said, scratching themselves and shivering, It's too damned cold. As they fled south to Florida or died. And in three or four billion years (there is some disagreement in the scientific community about the date) the solar and terrestrial cycles we now consider eternal will break down forever, and everything will die.

'Now class, if we accept this unsettling forecast surely it grows harder to take comfort in the synthetic regularity of work, the cooked-up punctuation of mealtimes, the punctual flipping over of calendar leaves decorated with scenes of Lake Huron sunsets or the wavering amber grainfields of China; harder to find strength for the annual famines of Lent and Av and Ramadan and other religious ordeals; harder to place faith in the transient order and precision of language, which – take this down please – "in the hands of a master of exposition is an intricate, prodigiously specific instrument of communication, and in the mouth of a major poet a conduit to the unconscious & the seething, insurgent (sic) imagination".'

Downing's handwriting was abysmal and even now this editor finds it difficult to decipher and transcribe. (This editor has been reading

Downing's scattered, eccentric essays on and off for years. His death frees her to publish them.)

And this:

One Monday morning at 8:30 sharp, Ralph Downing started out toward the office for the last time. He walked, trying to remember to swing his arms (fitting exercise into his morning routine, in hopes that by feigning the climb-every-mountain keenness of students and cheerful, dynamic sit-com career-women he would shake awake the Rip Van Winkling youngster in himself). Instead he aroused the memory of a teacher he'd had back in college. Professor Sarah Dawkins had taught philosophy (as well as editing collections of essays) and hers was the only humanities course Downing had ever much attended. Dawkins had given the erratic Downing an A+ for his unorthodox work, and one time she said to him in her characteristically forthright way, 'Ralph, I like you. You have a clear and simple way of looking at the world. A world that smirks and snickers while you persist in smiling, laughing. Stay simple, Ralph. Stay out of fashion, stay in love. Keep writing. Some day write a book about your way of looking at the world.'

This was years ago, of course, and I can't be sure I've remembered the exact words. But that hardly matters. A good scholar seldom says exactly what is in her mind – her heart. And perhaps, after all, in the muffled world we've professed and tutored and booked into being, it is necessary to distance oneself from people and events in order to perceive them clearly. Downing would not have made a good scholar. I knew this to be true and yet I did hope he would write his book – though I realized elements of the academic community (what a risible contradiction in terms) would demolish it were it ever published. Because it would deal in unfashionable earnest with that silent, roaring edge where things come into being and die. Because it would tug fiercely at the tweedy legs of tranced theorists floating off into ethers of abstraction, and it would pull them back down to earth, *somewhere out beyond all ideas* – to sweet, spontaneous earth, that perfect edge. Because it would force them to stare down, like Gloucester, into the writhing belly of the world: and see. See or lose sight forever. For aye. *Four eyes!* Because it would have to be written in a new dialect. A kind of poetry, Ralph once said, a kind of concrete incantation, that's the only wake-up call the truth understands. Make it dance. Make it dance all night. And maybe the whole thing could never be written anyway but would have to be acted out.

In the flesh.

Professor Dawkins had a fleeting vision of a philosophical road-show that would star the young Downing and which she would M.C. *Step right up, folks. Step right up.*

Downing entered the park and began to cut across the grass as he always did when the ground was dry. There was a time when he would have felt the grass even through the soles of his shoes. Or so he'd once

written. Now smells from an invisibly-tended garden reminded him of the 'power-lunch' he was to have at one; a smattering of small round silver flowers vibrant in the breeze put him in mind of a current project involving ballbearings. That battery-powered rolling pin, or was it the DoughMaster Electric Kneader – real time savers both. Then it struck him that these small silver flowers, whose name he thought he knew but could not quite summon up, would not always have resembled ballbearings. Because he'd been thinking of Sarah Dawkins, he supposed. Sarah.

He left the grass for the sidewalk at the far side of the park and sped up. *There is a field.*

Dawkins. Dear Professor Dawkins. Shit, he couldn't write that. SARAH. In reply to your letter of the fifth I've got to admit that, in the commonly accepted sense of the phrase, I've 'sold out'. My uncle has arranged for me to have a job as {&c &c} and I won't be returning to school to work with you next year. Though you warned me about the 'lulling monotony' and (I think you put it) 'stultifying hardship, stultifying ease' of a regular job and income I'm afraid 'the academy' has come to terrify me even more (not you but the other things, the competitive, coercive things – I know you understand) and so my decision is made. I realize it's fashionable in academic circles (what a contradiction in terms!) to see the 'real world' as the Great Whore or slaving Philistine, but I feel confident that I can continue to live my philosophy in the gullet of the Beast – while raising real cash I can use to make a difference & do good. Maybe this is the best way to prove it can work. After all it's too easy to be a saint in seclusion, a sage in an ivory tower. The only way to prove it, this. Wish me luck.

I want to thank you for the interest you showed in me and those ideas as no other professor ever did and gave me low marks as I told you before. {I} will visit in future.

ps: it occurs to me this will seem a little cold.

Don't ever think I could forget everything. Love,

R.D.

4

From The Early Essays:

Fast food has become the most important form of 'nutrition' in our society. I guess there are plenty of reasons for it – what disease has a single cause? – but I feel it's mainly because people think artificial food is somehow safer. I sense people these days will do almost anything to avoid absorbing real things.

5

Caught by the omniscient narrator in an act of glaring hypocrisy, Downing is seen extracting an instant breakfast, then a loaf of quick-bread, from his microwave. The loaf is a failure. He forgets to eat the breakfast. So little time!

6

The traffic was always heavy at this hour. Downing was forced to wait a few seconds before crossing the busy street west of the park. On the far side he began striding through the buildings of his old campus but this morning, instead of staring at the pavement ten paces ahead, planning his day and the next day and evening and the next and the next, and planning, like so many of us, everything up to and including his funeral details – noosing up each and every loose end, worrying, scurrying, his brain a gerbil on the Wheel of Worry – he looked up and around at the looming old limestone towers. There was the humanities hall. Thick vines of ivy had completed their squid-like, rapacious embrace of the whale-grey east wall, so that now only the windows could be seen.

Fact: Downing had been an excellent promotions manager. Had been praised for his imagination and initiative. Had himself been promoted almost annually for the first six years of his employment after starting as a minor clerk.

Fact: Downing read widely (non-fiction) and borrowed smartly for his promotional campaigns. Though his most remarkable policy as an undergraduate had been to refine his reading to the raw essentials (Rumi, Shakespeare, Whitman, Dickinson, the various scriptures – most of which his peers had not read) and, instead, weather permitting, to stage genial debates with puzzled companions, to compose dialogues with dead saints, heretics, zealots, helots, poets, profs and prophets, philosophers and other fruitcakes, *all ye who pitch your mansion on the precipice* – and to scribble bad poetry and stumble, laden with wine (what else?), through the local woods. And to spend nights with Sarah Dawkins.

There is a field.

Fact: Downing's marriage to another woman, much younger than Sarah Dawkins, had spoiled after fourteen years because 'he had changed'. Conventional explanation. Upheld however by the court. Visiting rights to comprise three visits monthly, none to exceed thirty-six hours in duration.

Fact: When after almost twenty years he had paid his old professor a visit, she'd seemed not to recognize him. 'Poor old Sarah must be going senile.' Conventional explanation. In this case incorrect. Dr. Hans's considered diagnosis was Alzheimer's Disease, incipient but certain to progress rapidly. Yes, two more pints here please and a packet of chips.

'Poor Sarah, she must be losing it.' She really hadn't known who he was! At first. Well, old four-eyes Downing wore contacts now. Or was it his grey herringbone suit? At college he'd dressed like a cross between Whitman and a Whirling Dervish. But no. People expect your attire to change with age. You get accustomed to the necktie. Fifty years on the gallows of fashion. Perhaps Doc Dawkins was this very instant peering through the double-paned storm of her glass window on level five of the humanities hall, two dark probing eyes whorled below with indigo, her small head steadily shaking the way certain old folks' heads will do, as if the world has become a daily reminder of how much they've lost and they must constantly deny and gainsay everything they see. *No. No. I must be dreaming.*

No –

But if she were there she would see only Downing's grey herringboned back, borne away in the rushing stream of students roaring through the stone canyons of the co-ed residence *somewhere out beyond* the college art gallery and on towards the lake and their morning classes. It was 8:50. On the pavement by the gallery Downing felt himself glare at his watch (as many of the students were doing) and looking up was surprised to see Sarah Dawkins standing motionless ten feet away.

– Sarah, he said. He managed.

The old woman did not reply. He noticed her eyes were still very clear, acute.

– Sarah. Sarah, you must remember me.

The old woman did not, apparently, as she would not confirm this allegation in words. She did seem to be weeping though.

7

Divorce approved by the court, 16 August 1989.

'Because you have changed.'

But when?

Impossible to say. Looking back over a lifetime, class, consider the salient patterns the vital episodes and occasions and then admit not here nor here, norhere, norhere. Nowhere. We betray ourselves slowly, act by act, at an insidious, anaesthetizing pace. I can remember the feeling of loving my office, its snugness, the smell of the desk, the shelves full of familiar reading, and much later I remember hating it for its smothering air, the stacks of unanswered correspondence, the impudent lopsided leer of books I had not read and would never get around to. But when the last twinges of affection yielded to pangs of dislike I can not say.

Language, they say, is a labyrinth. A maze where the gerbil runs. Like the library of a great university there are a million aisles and stacks and cracks and niches where the past can be discreetly shelved, a thousand

limestone wings and abutments behind which pivotal incidents or the shadow of another self can hide. Are hidden; were hidden; have been would be will be hidden. I was never like that at all, I haven't changed. I haven't lost a thing, the leaves of grass are still there surging under my bare heels and there is time, still time: *I'll meet you there.*

Yes, you will need to know this. But not for the exam.

Love, take this down:

Grammar is the greatest disguise. Though we need it, though it has its own stiff beauty. Trust poets, but only when they're new at the trade or have grown seasoned and reborn.

And yet

8

Before you, Sarah, I did have one good teacher. Last year. He said one time that whenever good friends ate together it was in 'the church of the holy restaurant'.

Everyone thought that was a laugh.

I laughed too, but from the belly.

9

Downing fidgeted while Sarah burned, like Rome, with her tears. He stole a glance at his watch: 8:51. As a young man he'd been a promoter of tears – *they make each face a rivered country where nothing is frozen, everything flows* he'd written messily in one of his most successful 'essays'. (In the margin there had been a red checkmark and an avidly scrawled *yes: Sarah.*)

Who continued to weep, a sentimental old woman. But Sarah that was years ago. I'm sorry your husband was a sad, stymied man who belittled your life's work and was swallowed completely by his own – but that is not my fault. For that much, at least, I'm not to blame. I could hardly have stayed with you. Think of us together now! You're an old woman – old. Weeping among the undergraduates, shamelessly. I wish you would stop now, Sarah. Sarah? Please. Stop it. Please.

For Christ's sake Sarah get a HOLD.

It was 8:53. Downing had not been late for years. A brisk purposeful nod to an acquaintance or a subtle eyes-averted circumvention, nothing personal you understand, was the best insurance against being late. (*The tyranny of appointments keeps us from penetrating the skins of passersby.* Another red checkmark – two.)

Sarah Dawkins kept weeping. Because of his hypocrisy? Hardly. Time makes hypocrites of us all. And everyone knows the Wheel World can't won on sidewalk conversation and sentimental philosophy. Always the need for food, for sleep. A field. Rice paddies in the sun.

– I'm sorry, Sarah, I'll be late, he said, brushing past her. For a second it really seemed his hand might edge out and seize hers, but the fallow, papery folding of her skin seen at close quarters stopped him. For a moment he thought he caught the rich dense scent of her hair – the same, the same. But he had to hurry. He'd be late.

– You had something, she said softly. She diagnosed? Her keen eyes peered from deep sockets encircled by a network of wrinkles. They were a few inches from Downing's eyes. They seemed to have a life of their own, like two remote faces pressed against abbey casements, consumptive poets peering from garret windows in a romantic myth, impossible to live...

– I've got to go Sarah. I'm sorry.

And Downing did go then, though glancing back at the bent woman as he rushed off he was startled by tears, tears of his own, then a sudden numbness in the arms, a pain around the heart. *Angina* – it sounded like some far, exotic country, a land of high dusty plains ringed with monasteries and remote, snowy mountains, monks filing among ruins and barrows in the high shrill air.... Stress-related, the pain. The tears were too, a function of stress. Always they came unexpectedly, a sudden upwelling from some mysterious spring he'd thought long dry – that he'd bricked up gradually as he discovered how peaceful life could be without insoluble questions and frantic, fruitless mental endeavour. Each year another brick. An old story, without beginning or end. Who can say when the last trickle dried? Doc Dawkins, wiping tears from her eyes: *the unexamined life is not worth living*. That rusty old saw. Anyone could see it was a joke, the melodramatic motto of neuropaths and tenured snakeoilers hoping to inject more sanguine souls with the venom of their angst. And yet these tears. A sudden hunger. Regular meals had always been soothing. When one ended there was another on deck. It was 8:58. The pain stabbed once, twice, unbearably, and Downing felt a part of himself fall – but here, here was the office tower. Yet he found himself walking past it and ignoring the curious stare of the secretary he usually met each morning at the front door, but now brushed by on the sidewalk. At 9:03 he crossed Division St (though Division St should not be here) and turned onto Union (though Union, too...) and started downhill toward the lake. He'd never done this sort of thing before. He felt irresponsible, exhilarated, a nine-year old skipping Math, and his body felt younger now too, the angina relenting, the word itself now sounding earthy, warm, and carnal. He felt good. A generous wave suffused him and he hoped Sarah was all right too. He sensed however it was too late to turn back and find out.

9:06, he was really late now. The lakefront was deserted save for a few students scattered on the grass sunbathing. *When the day is sunny and hot a true philosopher walks outdoors. Remember the stoa. A philosopher is a 'lover of knowledge' and should let the sun have knowledge of him. Grace consists in the breaking of skin* –

Three checkmarks here, an almost illegible Yes.

By around 9:25 Downing had found a trail leading into pine woods along the water. This was just past the federal penitentiary that juts out into the lake. *Placing a prison on the waterfront, in sight of a beach where the affluent student body sunbathes, seems to me a gratuitous insult with endless sadistic implications. With unconscious sensitivity the architects left out windows.*

The forest was dark and cool, deserted. It was almost ten when Ralph found his trail crooking sharply to the left where it really ought not to go. Though he'd never actually been here he'd seen enough maps of the region to know the lakeshore didn't veer or end so soon, but there it was: the shore turned south and receded into a brilliant shimmering light that fused water and sky to a single mass. For as far as he could see, headlands of emerald and silver ranged out like reaching fingers. The coast had grown rocky. Leaving the shore his trail became thinner, a mere trampling of grass and weeds, an animal track. He found himself climbing from the shoreline into open country, a moor of dwarf pines and wavering yellow grass glistening like cornfields in a stiff wind. The sun was hot on the pines and on the yellow grass. He removed his suitcoat and remembered to rest it on an esker by the trail so he could pick it up when he returned. He walked on, his faint track moving briefly inland then curving back to trace the cliffs and capes over the sea, for looking east he saw the lake had fanned impossibly into a wide expanse of water churned by cool onshore winds and traversed an hour offshore by a whale who arched his slick black spine, filled the air with a creamy, sexual spume and vanished deftly. The going along these cliffs was rough for his shoes slipped and careened on the stones so he removed them and found it easier to go barefoot though the naked feet stung and bled a little pierced he supposed by the knifesharp gravel. Coming down the stones turned gradually to sand, as a young child he glided down dunes in sprays of white scudding into a small cove where the sea breathed and expired continuous over salt and pebbled flotsam, it was hot, the high sun split in generous shafts the green was bloodwarm with the light he stripped and started to wade and found a fluted seafloor wavering underfoot heard music as water seeped through his open pores and long bones up to his chest now swimming and found himself both under and above his head arcing up to the left he did a slow stroke now steady breathing as he crossed the lake once to Garden Island near the ferry like a dolphin vaulting so the passengers ran to the rail and pointed and waved as a young man in Sarah's class he performed his creed and when he did not come and swam instead she understood and met him one evening on wolfe island with food and wine making love in a field behind a disused church she taught him how as his face breached up through a haze of water he saw mountains reared and sleeving themselves in snow clear as a blank page as skin as water a spectral element sweeps through him in rippling waves with numbness and then in the forest with sarah he called how the snow drifted through

us it seemed your tears ran down through dying foliage melting now underneath him the sea's fingers reached in reeds from what depths what silence twining at his balls ah sarah his ankles and toes & grew briefly into his growing hair through years I have left you nearing an island where we'll meet the far east side of the brain *somewhere out beyond all right doing and wrong doing there is a feast and we're swallowed, swallowed still* swimming the seafloor rose up in sand to meet him he walked from the water or on it onto banks where a meal was laid there were sandbrown loaves steaming in light bottles of redwine jewelled in the glass chilled & beaded even then he could taste them like summer the sun was nearly gone behind the far capes & light was longing like the world over sand into crowded forest above where maybe

By the gallery a small crowd of students gathered and turned over the body of Ralph Downing. One of them backed off a few steps and threw up in a tulip bed. A jogger in black tights raced off to find help.

– But I'm afraid we're – I'm afraid it's too late, said another of the students: a thin blond man in a medical school jacket.

Professor Dawkins peered between shoulders. She seemed to be crying. What could have happened, she said.

– It looks, he diagnosed, like he's had a severe myocardial – a heart attack. Bad. A really bad one. I'm afraid I can't risk any kind of resuscitation, I might injure him more.

Professor Dawkins insisted he try anyway, but the student said softly that his hands were tied. He pleaded inexperience and muttered something about lawsuits. Dawkins knelt beside the body and continued to weep. Please, she said. Please.

– I'm afraid we'll have to wait for the ambulance, the student said, tendering his hand toward the old woman's trembling shoulder and stopping just short. Try not to worry. There's still time after the heart stops.

– Yes?

a crowded forest above where maybe I find her & maybe

ten thousand fields of rice gleaming like fishscales in the sun

EDMUND O. BAMIRO

Recasting the Centre: Ngugi wa Thiong'o and the Africanization of English

The political, psychological, and sociolinguistic transmutations the English language undergoes in post-colonial contexts and societies have engaged the attention of both literary and linguistic scholars over the years.¹ The processes by which the use of the English language in post-colonial societies gradually move from an external to an internal norm have been variously labeled as 'nativization',² 'indigenization',³ 'relexification',⁴ and 'abrogation and appropriation'.⁵ For example, linguistic nativization refers to the process whereby English-knowing bilinguals in non-native English cultural and linguistic setting not only use the English language for representing typically non-native social, cultural, and emotional contexts, but also use various linguistic devices to contextualize the English language in their respective cultures.⁶ The language nativization process is similar to the other processes of 'indigenization' and 'relexification' respectively. As employed in post-colonial theory, 'abrogation and appropriation' refer to the processes whereby post-colonial writers define themselves by seizing the language of the centre and replacing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place. According to Bill Ashcroft *et al*:

The first, the abrogation or denial of the privilege of 'English' involves a rejection of the metropolitan power over the means of communication. The second, the appropriation and reconstitution of the language of the centre, the process of capturing and remoulding the language to new usages, marks a separation from the site of colonial privilege.⁷

My main purpose in this paper is to investigate the Africanization of English in Ngugi. Data for the discussion are based on Ngugi's five novels and the play he co-authored with Ngugi wa Miiiri.⁸ Ngugi's creative writing presents an interesting paradigm because, recently, his attitude to the English language has been one of outright repudiation. Unlike many other African writers like Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, and Gabriel Okara who believe that the English language will be able to carry the weight of their African socio-cultural experience, Ngugi begins his book *Decolonising the Mind* with the statement: 'This book ... is my farewell to English as a

vehicle for any of my writings. From now on, it is Gikuyu and Kiswahili all the way.⁹ This mood of total rejection of English as a medium for literary creativity is further reiterated in his most recent book, *Moving the Centre*: 'It was once again the question of moving the centre: from European languages to all other languages all over Africa and the world; a move if you like towards a pluralism of languages as legitimate vehicles of the human imagination.'¹⁰

However, a paradox seems to permeate the early Ngugi's creative thinking prior to his repudiation of English as a vehicle for his literary communication. He argues that although he writes his novels in English, he does not write in the fashion of Achebe or Okara who consciously bend the English language to reflect their African experience. In response to Reinhard Sander's and Ian Munro's question about the reasons his novels are written in predominantly Standard English, Ngugi states:

These writers (i.e. Achebe and Okara) are fed linguistically from below. They are fed by the idiom of speech, the rhythm of speech of the people about whom they are writing. You find that, on the whole, West Africans have been in a lot more contact with the English language than the East Africans. And you find that West Africans have even developed a form of English that is peculiar to the West African scene as the Pidgin English. So that somebody like Chinua Achebe finds it easy when he's portraying a character to fall back on Pidgin English as a form of characterization. We don't, on the whole, have an East African English yet, although it may come into being. So the kind of English we have in East Africa is very much the sort of school English with correct grammar, etc. But maybe in a few years' time in East Africa there will be a variation of English that can be used as a form of method of characterization. Meanwhile we shall be content merely to capture everything of ordinary life and speech, using the so-called Standard English.¹¹

In other words, Ngugi would want us to believe he does not consciously strive to Africanize his narrative idiom. However, a cursory reading of his works reveals that as far back as 1964 when he wrote *Weep Not, Child*, Ngugi unconsciously engaged in the nativization process and that his novels exhibit traces of 'East African English'. Linguistic nativization in Ngugi assumes two modes: on the one hand, Ngugi engages in the process of relexification of his mother tongue, Gikuyu, using English vocabulary but indigenous structures and rhythms¹² and, on the other hand, he resorts to linguistic appropriation whereby English words are redefined in new contexts. I shall discuss the process of linguistic nativization in Ngugi under the headings of 'Loanwords', 'English Words, African Values', and 'English Sentences, African Idiosyncrasies' respectively. In the following discussion the Standard British English (hereafter BE) equivalents, glosses, and other explanations are supplied in parentheses following the Kenyan English examples which are italicized. The inverted commas in the examples are the author's while the asterisk indicates that they actually occur in the narrative idiom or the 'outer frame', that is, language which serves as direct communication between author and readers, as op-

posed to the 'inner frame' which involves the protagonists and characters of the narrative communicating with each other directly and in reported speech. Consequently, the fact that many of these examples are attested in the narrative idiom indicates that Ngugi consciously or unconsciously uses them.

Loanwords

Loanwords typify the process whereby Ngugi subjects English words to the phonological and morphological processes of his native language. The inscription of Gikuyu morpho-phonemic dynamics on BE words involves the addition of vowels to the end of BE words and the breaking up of consonant clusters by the insertion of vowels as in the following examples:

1. They called him *Isaka** (WNC 33).
(The author himself explains that 'This was his Christian name, a corruption of Isaac' [WNC 33])
2. His father *Ezekieli* ... was a wealthy landowner...* (POB 13)
(Ezekiel)
3. ...the way she held up her chin as she spoke, had '*staili*' (POB 64)
(style)
4. The sign outside read: BETTER EAT AT *HIRITONI** (DOC 155)
(The BE equivalent of this example is given in the preceding discourse: 'But it had a self-important name, the Hilton' [DOC 155])
5. The *Sirena* cries out (WMWW 34).
(The BE equivalent is supplied in the following discourse: 'You dash out. Another siren' [WMWW 34])

English Words, African Values

Through the processes of relexification and appropriation, Ngugi inscribes African meaning and values into extant English words. In other words, English words are manipulated by Ngugi to produce and transmit meanings beyond the purely denotative reference of the words, conveying a wide range of emotional, attitudinal, and symbolic content. This is a counter-discursive strategy for challenging the dominant linguistic canons of BE. Although ten categories of lexico-semantic variation have been identified in African English,¹³ Ngugi's lexico-semantic relexification and appropriation take the modes of semantic shift, conversion, translation equivalence, analogical creation, and coinage.

Through the process of semantic shift, Ngugi appropriates extant English words and imbues them with new meanings in consonance with the East African historical and cultural context as in the following examples:

6. If you said that you did not know who the barber was, or where his shop was, people at once knew that you were either stranger or a *fool** (WNC 9)
(According to Ngugi, 'A fool, in the town's vocabulary, meant a man who had a wife who would not let him leave her lap even for a second' [WNC 9])
7. Gikonyo was among the first group of detainees to pass through the *pipe-line* back to the village* (GOW 51)
(According to Ngugi, 'The pipe-line was the official euphemism for the chain of concentration camps all the detainees had to pass through' [GOW 51])
8. 'I hear that they might be sending *travellers* to the moon' (POB 79)
(astronauts or cosmonauts).

In conversion, Ngugi subverts the dominant code by the deliberate transfer of a word from one part of speech to another without any change in its form. Like semantic shift, conversion is another example of linguistic appropriation as opposed to relexification. By circumventing the English code, Ngugi is able to economize his expressions and condense information. The following are some examples from the texts:

9. 'Don't *woman* me!' he shouted hysterically (WNC 53).
(to pester or nag like a woman)
10. Two *rifled* policemen...guarded the entrance* (GOW 172).
(carrying rifles)
11. Had she not ... *mothered* his child?* (GOW 183).
(X is a mother of Y)
12. He smiled once when he came to the *tarmac-ed* last stretch...* (POB 11).
(like a tarmac)
13. ...black policemen led by two gum-chewing white *khakied* officers* (POB 100)
(wearing khakis)
14. 'We *cold-showered* our bodies at five in the morning' (POB 168).
(had a cold shower)
15. A riot squad and *sired* police car came to the scene* (POB 183).
(blowing a siren)

Translation equivalence represents the process of relexification *par excellence*. As explained in the introduction, many African writers relexify their mother tongues, using English vocabulary but indigenous structures and rhythms. Generally speaking, loan-translations and calques are aspects of relexification. According to Zabuz,

relexification ... can be ... redefined as the forging of a new literary aesthetic medium out of the elements of an alien, dominant lexicon. As a method, relexification stems from a need to solve an immediate artistic problem: that of rendering African concepts, thought-patterns and linguistic features in the European language. As a strategy *in potentia*, relexification seeks to affirm the hidden or repressed original behind what is construed as the original language text.¹⁴

The ideological intention of translation equivalence is thus to superimpose the thought-system of the colonized subject on the dominant code. However, since typologies are never fool-proof, I find it difficult to distinguish between translation equivalents and coinages in certain contexts. Some of the examples furnished below could as well qualify as coinages.

- 15a. The two women usually stayed together to ... '*shorten*' the night (WNC 11).
 - b. They usually went there to *shorten* the night* (WNC 12)
(pass the night by telling traditional stories)
16. 'When will you *open* school?' (WNC 38).
(When will you *resume* school?)
17. 'You "*drink*" oath' (WNC 72).
(You take oath)
- 18a. 'What will you do after all your learning. I am sure you will be a *big man*' (WNC 105).
 - b. '...he was probably the first such *big man* in our village...' (POB 39).
(an important person)
19. 'Then - you - come to laugh at me. To laugh at your own father. *I'll go home*, don't worry' (WNC 123).
(I'll die')
20. ...everybody knew that Kabonyi was *ill** (RB 97).
(As explained by the author, 'Actually he was not ill, but he was full of fury' [RB 97])
21. The *iron snake* ... was quickly wriggling towards Nairobi* (GOW 12).
(railroad)
- 22a. The whiteman with *bamboo poles that vomited fire** (GOW 12).
 - b. They all carried *bamboo sticks that vomited fire** (POB 122).
 - c. '*A piece of metal pipe that emits fatal fire and smoke*,' Muturi said (DOC 211).
(guns)
23. Brushing sides with women's skirts* (GOW 52).
(doing a woman's job)
24. Men bought dances* (GOW 63).
(According to Ngugi, 'When a person bought a dance, the guitarist played for him alone, praising his name, always the son of a woman' [GOW 63])
25. that was twelve years after Godfrey Munira ... first rode a *metal horse** (POB 5).
(a bicycle)
26. 'the men in the city - we hear that they put a *rubber trouser* on it?' (POB 74).
(condom)
27. - a city whose buildings touched the sky* (POB 117).
(skyscrapers)
28. ...it was he who had casually broached the possibility of his supplying us with '*grains of maize*' (POB 223-224).
(bullets)

29. ...school children brought in hired lorries to see the *winged horse** (POB 257).
(airplane)
30. And the road workers would raise their voices above the roar of the *earth-eating machines** (POB 265).
(caterpillars)
31. ...all the potent drinks that were brewed there: Changaa, Kang'ari, *Kill-me-Quick** (POB 284).
(a locally brewed hard drink)
32. ...who thinks he has found a Kareendi of the *easy thighs?** (DOC 27).
(a woman of easy virtues)
33. 'I thought you only knew this *language of "Good morning"'* (DOC 57).
(the English language)
34. 'It could be the *woman's disease,*' Mwaura said (DOC 69).
(pregnancy)
35. '...let's shower saliva on our breasts...' (DOC 87).
(pray)

Translation equivalence is also underscored through the use of native figures of speech and proverbs. It is through the use of these devices that Ngugi, for example, is able to evoke the cultural milieu in which the action takes place. Examples of such figures of speech include 'Your breasts were full and pointed like the tip of the sharpest thorn' (WMWW 22), 'they sang songs/With words that pierced one's heart like a spear' (WMWW 26), 'you look like an old basket/That has lost all shape' (WMWW 29), etc. Ngugi also 'transcreates' proverbs from his native language. The culture-embeddedness of such linguistic items is well-recognized and, as Achebe says, they are 'the palm-oil with which words are eaten'.¹⁵ Ngugi's use of proverbs often focuses on the values of the society as in the following examples: 'A man brags about his own penis,/However tiny' (WMWW 4), 'An aging hero has no admirers' (WMWW 13), 'A fool's walking stick supports the clever' (WMWW 15), 'When axes are kept in one basket, they must necessarily knock against each other' (WMWW 17), 'there's no maiden worth the name who wants to get grey hairs at her parents' home' (WMWW 17), etc.

Analogical creation is the formation of new words on the basis of partial likeness or agreement in form or in sense with already existing words in English. Word formation processes in English such as affixation and compounding are very productive analogy models in Englishes. The following are some examples:

- 36a. Normally she chatted with her *houseboy** (GOW 34).
- b. 'I told you about the *houseboy*' (GOW 143).
(BE = housekeeper; this usage probably originated from the fact that although the domestic chores of a housekeeper in Western contexts may be restricted, a houseboy in the African context is several things at the same time – driver,

baby-sitter, cleaner, cook, launderer, watchman, etc. – depending on the caprices of the master. Ironically, the British colonial masters encouraged the use of houseboy as a form of denigration of their male servants; cf. *housegirl*).

37. 'Don't I see those *town-people*?' (POB 9).
(BE = townspeople)
38. The Haraambe ... is not for *gossipers** (DOC 39).
(BE = gossips)
- 39a. 'I'm not the one who has instructed their wives to become "*sugar mummies*"' (DOC 122)
 - b. *Sugarmummies* and *sugardaddies*/ Are now all over the land (WMWW 63).
(cf. *sugar-daddies*; rich, usually elderly, women who are generous to young men in return for sexual favours or friendship).

Finally, chiefly through the word-formation process of compounding, East African users of English invent words or word groups which not only help in collapsing potentially longer expressions or structures but also aid in fashioning words that convey new cognitive and sociolinguistic reality peculiar to the world Ngugi attempts to represent. Coinages found in Ngugi include the following:

40. Some people called them *devil's waters* because they deceived you* (WNC 5).
(mirage; Ngugi himself explains this phenomenon in the following manner: 'when you travelled along it (the road) on hot days you saw little lakes ahead of you. But when you went near, the lakes vanished' [WNC 5])
41. Her other son had died in the *Big War** (WNC 16).
(the Second World War)
- 42a. 'Remember, tomorrow is the day of your *second birth*' (RB 9).
 - b. *Birth, Second Birth, Initiation** (DOC 227).
(initiation ceremony into manhood)
- 43a. ...he had employed two men, a driver and a *turn-boy** (GOW 53).
 - b. ...the *turn-boy* whistled* (GOW 197)
 - c. The drivers and the *turn boys* would often spend the night there* (POB 266).
(driver(s) or conductor(s) who takes turns with another driver)
44. Mysterious stories about him spread among the *market women** (GOW 156).
(women traders)
45. Their feet would dig into the '*small loads*' (GOW 170).
(excreta)
46. '...he'll always be your husband unless he demands back his *bride-price*' (GOW 201).
(dowry)
47. 'You should see us, the *roadboys* as they call us' (POB 104).
(boys hawking odds and ends by the roadside)
48. ...he saw a chance to finally still the occasional voices of guilt since his *midnight tea* at Gatundu* (POB 114).
(secret oath-taking)

- 49a. 'That is Boss Kihara's *sugar girl*' (DOC 22).
- b. 'No, I refused to be his *sugar girl*,' Wariinga said (DOC 73).
(girl friend or mistress)
- 50. '...it had first given me a small *back-hander* of about 2,000,000 shillings' (DOC 116).
(bribe)
- 51. My mother's *bridewealth* was a calf taken in battle (WMWW 12).
(dowry)
- 52. ...she would like to dress up/Like all her *age-mates* (WMWW 105).
(people in the same age group)

In terms of their counter-discursive strategy, the foregoing Kenyan English expressions challenge the territoriality of British English and thus polarize African and colonial discourses. Paradoxically, since necessity is the mother of invention, many of these ethnolexemes – Isaka, Ezekieli, staili, Hiritoni, sirena, pipe-line, travellers, iron snake, bamboo poles that vomited fire, metal horse, rubber trouser, grains of maize, winged horse, earth-eating machines, and houseboy – are the products of the contact and convergence between Kenyan and English cultures, serving as naming devices for the East African who is forced to signify names, people, and places in the other tongue. Notice, however, that the lexical innovation, *houseboy*, is used by Margery Thompson, the wife of a British colonial officer in *A Grain of Wheat*. These ethnolinguistic forms thus confirm W.D. Ashcroft's view that 'language variance is *metonymic*, a synechdochic index of cultural difference which affirms the distance of cultures at the very moment in which it proposes to bring them together'.¹⁶

English Sentences, African Idiosyncrasies

Through the process of relexification, Ngugi grafts the linguistic structures of his native language onto the English language, while through appropriation he subverts the formation-rules of English syntax. The process of relexification is similar to Ashcroft's syntactic fusion 'in which the english prose is structured according to the syntactic principles of a first language'.¹⁷ Syntactic variations such as double subjects, reduplications, peculiar use of the tag question and emphatic premodification illustrate the process of relexification or syntactic fusion while features such as substitution of prepositions, non-distinctive use of reciprocal pronouns, unusual pluralization, and superfluous conjoining are typical of appropriation or subversion.

Double subjects are constructions which involve the subject of the sentence as focus and an anaphoric pronoun subject or complement, for example:

53. 'It is a bad woman this' (WNC 23).
(This is a bad woman')
54. 'My legs, they shake' (RB 97).
(My legs shake')
55. 'And her voice, it is like a song' (GOW 139).
(...her voice is like a song')

The reduplication of lexical items belonging to various word classes is used for emphasis and to indicate continuation of a process. Examples noted in Ngugi include the following:

56. Suddenly Waiyaki became *jealous, jealous* for Nyambura* (POB 88).
57. ...she would walk *slowly, slowly** (RB 104).
58. 'They never listened to the political *talk-talk* of a few men' (GOW 77).
59. ...the third would *pat-pat* the crying baby* (POB 24).
60. 'Mr. Antelope ... you go *jump-jumping, leap-leaping* in the air' (POB 179).
61. 'I went out into the street again, looking only for *tall, tall* buildings' (DOC 42).

The peculiar use of tag questions, also noticeable in West African English, occurs in Ngugi. For example, in BE, the structure of tag questions is composed of a statement and a tag attached to it. In such structures there is contrasting polarity: a positive main clause is followed by a negative tag and vice versa. In many African languages, and particularly West African languages with which this writer is familiar, the parallel structure consists of a single clause with a postposed particle. For example in Yoruba spoken in Nigeria, this particle is realized as *abi?*. The same tendency is observable in the Fanti language spoken in Ghana where the contrasting polarity tags are collapsed in the expression *mebua?*. The tag observed in Ngugi is *not so?* which may be the relexified form of the Gikuyu structure:

62. You were the only one who said that we should cook food for the visitors, *not so?* (WMWW 19).
(You were the only one who said that we should cook food for the visitors, *weren't you?*)

Emphatic premodification in Ngugi involves the use of a redundant pre-modifier to achieve emphasis, as in the following example:

63. ...we can defeat the enemy of *this our land* (WMWW 66).
(*'this land'* or *'our land'*)

Since many African languages either do not have overt prepositions or do not have prepositions which correspond to the English ones, Ngugi sometimes substitutes prepositions as in the following example:

64. Suddenly Waiyaki became jealous, *jealous for* Nyambura* (RB 88).
 (...jealous *of* Nyambura)

Ngugi also subverts the formation-rules of English syntax by his non-distinctive use of reciprocal pronouns. For example, according to Randolph Quirk and Sidney Greenbaum, the reciprocal pronoun *each other* is commoner in a sentence with two antecedents, e.g., 'John and Mary like each other'; however, where more than two antecedents are involved, the reciprocal pronoun *one another* is often preferred, e.g., 'The four children are fond of one another'.¹⁸ Ngugi, like many other African users of English, does not distinguish between the reciprocal pronouns *each other* and *one another* as in the following examples:

65. Two of the ridges in the opposite sides of the long sides of the plain ... were near *one another** (WNC 7).
 66. Nyambura and Miriamu looked at *one another** (RB 34).
 67. The two avoided *one another* for the rest of the day* (GOW 96).
 68. Gradually, Wariinga and the Rich Old Man got to know *one another** (DOC 143).

Ngugi also sometimes subverts the pluralization rules of English, as in the following example:

69. '...big *companys* are busy collecting gold' (POB 238).
 (companies)

Again, we have a subversion of the conjunction rules of English in the following example:

70. *But* he was able to be clever *although* he was a little bit rough* (WNC 20).

In conclusion, it ought to be emphasized that although Ngugi does not believe that he writes in an 'East African English' or 'Kenyan English', this study has amply demonstrated that Ngugi consciously or unconsciously engages in linguistic nativization in his creative writing. In fact, the conscious Africanization of his use of English is evident in his parenthetical and in-text explanations and glosses of some of the loan-words and lexical items furnished in this study (such as examples 1, 6, 7, 20, 24 and 40).

It also ought to be pointed out that many of the modes of lexico-semantic and syntactic variation noted in Ngugi are also found in the creative writing of his West African counterparts like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Gabriel Okara, and Ayi Kwei Armah.¹⁹ It is thus doubtful whether any post-colonial writer using English as a second or foreign language can escape nativizing or indigenizing the language altogether. Consequently, although Ngugi has successfully moved the centre of his

creative writing from the code of 'standard' British English to that of his mother tongue, Gikuyu, this movement has not occurred without his prior reterritorialization of the English language. As Ashcroft *et al.* rightly observe:

...the syncretic and hybridized nature of post-colonial experience ... refutes the notions that often attract post-colonial critics: that cultural practices can return to some 'pure' and unsullied cultural condition, and that such practices themselves, such as the use of vernacular terms or grammatical forms in English literature, can embody such an authenticity. Therefore, syncretic views of the post-colonial distance themselves from the universalist view of the function of language as representation, and from a culturally essentialist stance which might reject the use of English because of its assumed inauthenticity in the 'non-English' place.²⁰

NOTES

1. I am grateful to Professor Susan Gingell whose comments on the first draft of this paper have resulted in an overall improvement of its conceptual framework.
2. Braj B. Kachru, *The Alchemy of English: The Spread, Functions, and Models of Non-Native Englishes* (Urbana and Illinois: U of Illinois P, 1990), pp. 21-22.
3. Chantal Zabus, *The African Palimpsest: Indigenization of Language in the West African Europhone Novel* (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1991), pp. 3-10.
4. Loretto Todd, 'The English Language in West Africa', in Richard W. Bailey and Manfred Gorch, eds., *English as a World Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1982), pp. 297-298.
5. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 38-39.
6. Edmund O. Bamiro, 'Nigerian Englishes in Nigerian English literature', *World Englishes* 10.1 (1991), 7-17.
7. Ashcroft *et al.*, op.cit., p. 38.
8. *Weep Not, Child* (London: Heinemann, 1964); *The River Between* (London: Heinemann, 1965); *A Grain of Wheat* (London: Heinemann, 1967); *Petals of Blood* (London: Heinemann, 1977); *Devil on the Cross* (London: Heinemann, 1982), *I Will Marry When I Want* (London: Heinemann, 1982). After excerpts, the novels and the play will be identified as follows: WNC, RB, GOW, POB, DOC, and WMWW.
9. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, 1986), p. xiv.
10. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Moving the Centre: the Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (London: James Currey, 1993), p. 10.
11. Reinhard Sander and Ian Munro, 'Tolstoy in Africa: An Interview with Ngugi wa Thiong'o', in G.D. Killam, ed., *Critical Perspectives on Ngugi wa Thiong'o* (Washington, DC: Three Continents P., 1984), pp. 48-49.
12. Todd, op. cit., pp. 297-298.
13. See Edmund O. Bamiro, 'Lexico-semantic Variation in Nigerian English', *World Englishes* 13.1 (1994), pp. 47-60. The ten categories are loanshift, semantic under-differentiation, lexico-semantic duplication and redundancy, ellipsis, conversion, clipping, acronyms, translation equivalents, analogical creation, and coinage.

14. Chantal Zabus, 'Under the Palimpsest and Beyond: The 'Original' in the West African Europhone Novel', in Geoffrey V. Davis and Hena Maes-Jelinck, eds., *Crisis and Creativity in the New Literatures in English* (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1990), p. 106.
15. Chinua Achebe, 'Foreword', in W.H. Whitley, ed., *A Selection of African Prose* (Oxford: Clarendon P., 1964), p. viii.
16. W.D. Ashcroft, 'Constitutive Graphonomy: A Post-Colonial Theory of Literary Writing', *Kunapipi* 11 (1989), p. 71.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
18. Randolph Quirk and Sidney Greenbaum, *A University Grammar of English* (London: Longman, 1973), p. 105.
19. See, for example, Bamiro, *op.cit.*, pp. 7-17, pp. 47-60.
20. Ashcroft *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-42.

LOUIS JAMES

How Many Islands Are There in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*?

'How many islands are mentioned in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*?'¹ It is a question which I sometimes ask when teaching the novel, to catch out the lazy ones. 'One', chorus those who have only seen the film, which is set in Jamaica. The more observant ones point out there are two, the Jamaica of Spanish town and Coulibri; and the 'honeymoon' island, where Antoinette spent her childhood at Grandbois. 'And then there's the island of England, of course,' note the thoughtful.

Yet the question is more than an observance test. For the novel, as I will show, is not about one, or even three, but of several islands, – geographical, racial, imagined. Firstly, geographical. The story begins with the Cosways 'marooned' on the Coulibri estate on the English-dominated island of Jamaica. Their isolation is intensified by the fact that Antoinette's mother and their family servant, Christophine came from Martinique, an island predominantly French and Catholic. Christophine's friend Maillotte, 'not from Jamaica', is perhaps from still another island (p. 18). Baptiste was born on the 'honeymoon island', but has spent most of his life on St. Kitts (p. 75).

The 'honeymoon island' where Grandbois is situated is another island again, and not Martinique. Christophine tells Antoinette to leave Grandbois and 'visit your cousin in Martinique' (p. 91). The family stay at Grandbois, presumably, after they have come to Jamaica. Christophine is given to Antoinette as a wedding present after they have arrived in Jamaica (p. 18), yet when Antoinette has her vision of the rats at Grandbois – 'In that little bedroom', as she tells 'Rochester' (p. 69) – it is Christophine who warns her not to sleep in the moonlight.

A clue to the identity of the Cosway's 'honeymoon island', may be given in the name of the fishing village where they land, Massacre. For Massacre is a fishing village on the leeward coast of Dominica, lying below the long climb to the holiday cottage Jean Rhys's father built in the mountains, a house surrounded by a verandah where, as in the story, stood a telescope. Jean Rhys used similar clues elsewhere, as when she uses the geographical coordinates of the island to establish Anna Morgan comes from Dominica in *Voyage in the Dark* (1934) (p. 15).²

At this point, geography shifts into the symbolic, for the name 'Massacre' refers not only to a specific island, but to the ominous presence of forgotten historical disasters as to a specific place. As the night-long crowing of the cock foretells betrayal. Jean Rhys also sets Coulibri Estate set near Spanish Town in Jamaica. Jean Rhys never visited Jamaica, and the landscape she portrays is totally alien to that part of the island. The description rather indicates her lush childhood island of Dominica. So does the name. Though there may be several 'Coulibris' (the name means 'humming bird'), Jean Rhys knew well the Coulibri Estate in Dominica, situated on Grand Bay next to Genever, the ancestral home of her great grandmother. It was the destruction of Genever by a mob of emancipated slaves in 1844 that Jean Rhys remembered when describing the burning of Coulibri in the novel.

Imaginatively and descriptively, then, Coulibri and Grandbois at times appear to be on one island, and many readers, as the film, confuse the two. Yet in the narration, Jean Rhys is careful to distinguish between them. For the 'honeymoon island', Grandbois, is a Caribbean Eden, the world of childhood innocence. Although Christophine was 'given' to Antoinette as a slave, there is no sense of the slave relationship; Christophine is Annette's closest support and Antoinette's surrogate mother. For Antoinette, Granbois is an unfallen world, 'sacred to the sun' (p. 109). On her return to it Antoinette behaves with the confidence and sense of belonging attributed in Jamaica to her black friend Tia, 'for whom fires lit, stones did not cut, who never cried' (p. 20). Antoinette swims in the pool at Grandbois, unafraid of the monster crab, of snakes, or red ants. 'This is my place, and everything is on our side,' she declares (p. 62).

The world of Jamaica, on the other hand, is a paradise lost. It is an Eden fallen through the horrors of slavery, colonialism, class, and the materialist worship of money. Antoinette says, 'Our (Coulibri) garden was large and beautiful as the Garden in the Bible – the tree of life grew there. But it had gone wild' (p. 16). Its exotic beauty is ominous; the wonderful, sweet-smelling octopus orchid menacing. 'I never went near it' (p. 17). In Jamaica Antoinette is aware of herself as an alien, and she envies Tia her natural affinity with the place. Obeah, too, turns threatening. In early childhood it was so close to her she understood it instinctively. But in a Coulibri being put in British order by the newly arrived Mr. Mason, its magic bursts menacingly into her self-consciousness.

I was certain that hidden in the room (behind the old black press?) there was a dead man's dried hand, white chicken feathers, a cock with its throat cut, dying slowly, slowly. Drop by drop the blood was falling into a red bason and I imagined I could hear it. No one had ever spoken to me about obeah – but I knew what I would find if I dared to look. Then Christophine came in smiling and pleased to see me. Nothing alarming ever happened and I forgot, or told myself I had forgotten. (pp. 26-7)

The portrayal of place elides with the question, what is 'real'? The film version of the book is surely wrong to portray the objects of obeah ritual here as *physically* present in the room. Their reality is in the mind. Later, after receiving the fatal letter from Daniel Cosway impugning Antoinette, Rochester wanders into a ruined house haunted, it is said, by a dead priest (pp. 86-7). He feels a strange peace in the green light, and stands motionless. But is there a house? Returning, he tells Baptiste that he has followed an old paved road. Baptiste is insistent. There is no such road. When a girl carrying an offering of flowers sees him, screams, and runs, it is intimated what has happened. Just as Antoinette empathetically entered for a moment the world of obeah, so Rochester, in his alienation from Antoinette, has entered the dimension of the zombi. As he reads, 'A zombi is a dead person who seems to be alive or a living person who is dead ... sometimes to be propitiated with sacrifices or offerings of flowers and fruit' (p. 89).

If the novel explores psychically determined dimensions of reality, it questions the very meaning of 'place'. Thus, when Antoinette and 'Rochester' arrive at Grandbois, they debate the reality of their respective worlds:

'Is it true,' she said, 'that England is like a dream? Because one of my friends who married an Englishman wrote and told me so. She said this place London is like a cold dark dream sometimes. I want to wake up.'

'Well,' I answered annoyed, 'that is precisely how your beautiful island seems to me, quite unreal and like a dream.'

'But how can rivers and mountains and the sea be unreal?'

'More easily,' she said, 'much more easily. Yes a big city must be like a dream.'

'No, this is unreal and like a dream,' I thought. (p. 67)

And this debate is repeated elsewhere. Later, for instance, when Antoinette visits Christophine seeking the potion that will recover 'Rochester's' love, she muses about England, 'rose pink in the geography book map ... Exports, coal, iron, wool ... I must remember about chandeliers and dancing, about swans and roses and snow. And snow.' 'England,' asks Christophine sharply. 'You think there is such a place?' (p. 92).

The question returns with tragic insistency when Antoinette has crossed the Atlantic. Imprisoned in Thronfield Hall, she finds herself in a strange, 'cardboard' world:

As I walk along the passages I wish I could see behind the cardboard. They tell me I am in England, but I don't believe them. We lost our way to England. When? Where? ... (p. 147)

(That afternoon we went to England. there was grass and olive-green water and tall trees looking into the water. This, I thought, is England.) (p. 150)

'Rochester' in turn, while entranced with Grandbois, has had a sense that he is enclosed, shut out from 'reality'. As he says:

It was a beautiful place – wild, untouched, above all untouched, with an alien, disturbing, secret loveliness. And it kept its secret. I'd find myself thinking, 'What I see is nothing – I want what it *hides* – that is not nothing'. (p. 73)

Both Antoinette and 'Rochester' 'thirst' for another level of reality behind the 'mask'. The extraordinary fiction of the Guyanese writer Wilson Harris is different in many ways to that of Jean Rhys, but both centrally important Caribbean writers continually explore the interplay of place and self. Thus, at the centre of Harris's best-known work, *Palace of the Peacock* (1960),³ the narrator stutters that the expedition into the interior is held back by 'fear of acknowledging the true substance of life' (p. 59). The debate about the 'true substance of life' is also the key to *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

The nature of this reality, in both writers, is neither static nor single. It exists in contraries. Rochester is wrong in thinking there is a simple 'It' behind the mask. The child Antoinette empathises with the intense beauty of Caribbean nature as a child at Grandbois. But for her too, it is not the only reality. It is at the idyllic Grandbois, as we have noted, that she has her first terrifying intimation of evil, the spectral rats in the moonlight. Rochester destroys but also creates. 'I never wished to live before I knew you,' Antoinette tells Rochester (p. 76), and if this is a lover's hyperbole, it is wrong to dismiss the 'real' happiness that both of them share. The 'reality' is both benevolent and hostile. On the first night at Grandbois, a beautiful 'gentleman' moth (signifying 'Rochester?') is singed in the candle. Rochester saves it, and Antoinette, to prevent it coming back, extinguishes the candles, 'It's light enough by the stars,' says Antoinette (p. 68). After the catastrophe, the moth image returns, pessimistically: "'It doesn't matter,'" she answered calmly, "what I believe or you believe, because we can do nothing about it, we are like these." *She flicked a dead moth off the table*' (my italics) (p. 105). The 'reality' of beauty where 'it's light enough by the stars', and the dark world lit only by destructive fire co-exist, in constant interaction.

A central image of the novel is fire. 'Fires always lit' for Tia, and the phrase returns to mind when the blacks fire the great house, and the Cosways flee for their lives, Pierre and their pet parrot killed in the blaze. The image is one of destruction. Yet on another dimension, it is the slaves' resistance to the continued oppression of the whites – the cause for the riot, it is suggested, is Mason's plan to give the blacks' livelihood to imported Indian workers (p. 30).

The burning of Coulibri mirrors the Heraclitian fire in the tragic cycle of Caribbean history, both destroying and creative. Throughout the novel, the conscious progress of the story has been shadowed by Antoinette's sequence of three dreams, and as the book's climax approaches, the final

vision brings together all the elements in the book, no longer intimated, but sharp with the brilliant intensity of flame:

Then I turned round and saw the sky. It was red and all my life was in it. I saw the grandfather clock and Aunt Cora's patchwork, all colours, I saw orchids and the stephanotis and the jasmine and the tree of life in flames. I saw the chandelier and the red carpet downstairs and the bamboos and the tree ferns, the gold ferns and the silver, and the soft green velvet of the moss on the garden wall. I saw my doll's house and the books and the picture of the Miller's Daughter. I heard the parrot call as he did when he saw a stranger, *Qui est la? Qui est la?* and the man who hated me was calling too, Bertha! Bertha! (p. 155)

The image of the parrot, which fell to its death in flames because Mason had clipped its wings, links with Antoinette, who in Charlotte Brontë's novel is fated also to fall burning from the battlements of Thornfield Hall. But Antoinette in her newly discovered passion is no longer 'clipped' by Rochester. 'The wind caught my hair,' she dreams, 'and it streamed out like wings' (p. 155). The name Coulibri itself means 'humming bird', the flash of light suspended on invisible wings.

Just previous to this Antoinette has recovered her dress, red – the colour of fire and passion. It is scented with the Caribbean – 'the smell of vetivert and frangipanni, of cinnamon and dust and lime trees when they are flowering. The smell of the sun and the smell of the rain' (p. 151). But there is a final twist. Magically, the image of a world in flames focuses into that of controlled light and meditation, the candle that she carries to perform 'what I have to do. There must have been a draught for the flame flickered and I thought it was out. But I shielded it with my hand and it burnt up again to light me along the dark passage' (p. 156). It is a brilliant image of her own survival, and also of the human spirit; an echo of St. John 1, v – 'the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended [overcame] it not.'

There are many islands in the novel – geographical, social and mental – and the complexity of the Caribbean region is used by Rhys to intimate the fragmentation of West Indian experience. But it is also a stage for the search for 'the substance of life', resolved in the profoundly ambivalent image of fire, and Antoinette's discovery of her one true self. There are many islands in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. There is one island, the creative human spirit.

NOTES

1. Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968).
2. Jean Rhys, *Voyage in the Dark* (London; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969).
3. Wilson Harris, *Palace of the Peacock* (London: Faber, 1960).

OLIVE SENIOR

The Lizardy Man and His Lady

'Bang! Bang! You dead!'

'No. I shoot you first!'

'No. I first say you dead.'

'Well I'm not playing with you again. You not playing fair.'

'Is you cheating.'

'No. Is you.'

Jesus Mary and Joseph! What wrong with you children ee? Shelly-Ann, what kind of noise that you making in the people house? Roger, why you have to go on like big man so? You know what, the two of you better sit down quiet and watch TV. Eh, Miss Ersie? We don't want to hear another peep out of you. If I have any more bother from you Miss Shelly-Ann, home you go. And I not bringing you back to play with Roger again if is so you going to behave. When I come here to visit Miss Ersie, we don't want no noise and confusion in we head.

... as I was saying Miss Ersie and this is the Lord own truth, if it wasn't for the little one there, me would leave long time, you know. Go right back to mi owna yard. For certain things people like me and you shouldn't have no call to put up with at our age. Seh what? Yes mi'dear. Getting worse every day. You lucky you have a nice family like this to work for. That's what I was used to one time too. But sometimes you can't predict how things will turn out, ee? Like when you see what can happen to some people good-good pickney. When you see how them can turn down. A walla-walla with so-so bad company. Me seh, her mother would have belly-come-down pain if she could see the class of people fe har pickney a mix with these last days.

Seh what? You hear him was in prison in Miami one time? Fe ganja? A same so me did hear. A whole plane load. And now them say him in the other business there big big. What them call it? Eh-hm. The coke and the crack and all them sinting. Imagine eh mam? Is that me big-woman have to live with. But you see me here, although me have to live in the same house, you have to say is fe him money paying me, still and all Miss Ersie, me walk far from him, you know. Me do me job and me say 'yes sir', 'no

sir' to everything and me swallow mi tongue. Not that him really exchange more than two word with anybody. Him not a talking man. And them seh you can eat with the devil if you carry a long spoon. So my spoon well long.

Seh what? Her family? Lawd mi dear, them don't business with her again. At all t'all. Then you never know seh the family cut her off? Me never tell you? Well what I should say is, she refuse to have one single thing to do with them from the time she leave the husband and go move in with the first fellow there. Didn't like what her mother have to say one bit. So she just cut herself off. Well that one didn't last very long, I can tell you. And is a good thing her family don't even know the half of it. Suppose them did know the kind of life she was a lead?

Well, me stick with her through thick and thin, move up and down town with her, for who else she have to look after little Shelly-Ann? And me not lying, some time there she don't even have money to pay mi wages. I don't even know what we eat. From she leave the husband, she suck salt. I tell you. Suck salt. From one man to the next till she meet up with this one and them move into the house here. Well, him seem to have plenty money to throw around. Give her more gold chain and ring and all them sinting. Satellite dish pon the roof. Plenty food pon table. She jump inna plane gawn a Miami every two minute. But for all that, there is other kind of crosses, as me and you know, mi dear.

Well yes, she did get a job when she leave the husband. Job here, job there, but she never stay long in any of them. For Miss Ella nuh too use to work, and me nuh think they was paying her too much money for all that. And the kind of place we had was to move to! Imagine a woman of that pedigree living in one little flat in the back of people yard. It wasn't what she was used to, I can tell you. But is she make her bed, so she had was to lie on it. Plenty time, when she feeling down down down, when she just a cry the living eye water, them time me say: 'Miss Ella, go and make your peace with your parents. Go to your mother and father and beg their forgiveness. They will take you back in for they love you regardless. They will look after you and Shelly-Ann. You can't continue to live so.'

Miss Ersie, I tell you those time my heart really go out to her. She sucking salt. But she say no, was too proud to humble herself.

Me tell you. You see her there now a mix up herself with every kind of riff-raff? You wouldn't believe what a pretty pickney she used to be. The class of family that girl come from. Born into mi hand, you have to say. Is me raise and grow her. And when she get married, is me her mother beg go with her to go set up her own house.

Her mother say to me, 'Gatha. I don't know how I myself going to manage without you. But Ella need you more than me now. Is no use sending one of these foolish little young girls that don't know one thing to work for her. Is you going have to show her everything about keeping

house.' Well. I never want to leave my old mistress, for is twenty-five years I work with her, leave my mother yard as a young little pickney to go there. And me and her have our ups and down, for she have her ways there like all of them. But I not lying to you, she still better than most, for she treat me fair and square. Couldn't say she never fair. So since she ask me, I go with Miss Ella. For is big man she marry, you know. Expecting her to entertain all twenty people to dinner party one night and them sort of thing.

Well she did know how to look pretty and dress up herself, but that is all she know. I really have to say I don't know what she woulda do without me. And that is not boassify. Is the Lord own truth. For me not lying. Miss Ella get married but she couldn't do one single thing, spoil like all them other rich people pickney. Have somebody walk and pick up after them from morning till night. Left to me, she wouldn't grow so. She woulda learn to do something for herself. But as far as her mother and father concern, like how them don't have no other children, the sun rise and set on her. 'Gatha, don't worry. Ella will learn in time', is what fe har mother used to say every time I quarrel about how Miss Ella keep her room, how she just throw down everything on the floor for me to pick up. I never like it at all and I did raise my voice to her sometime, for I didn't feel it was right to bring up a girl-pickney so. Eh, Miss Ersie? Don't you feel seh girl pickney must learn to look after themself, rich or no rich? Nuh so! But is them spoil her. The parents spoil her from she born. That is the Lord own truth.

'Let's play house.'

'Okay. This is my briefcase. Where are my car keys?'

'What you want briefcase for?'

'Because I'm the daddy and the daddy always have a briefcase.'

'My daddy don't.'

'Not true. I see him with briefcase.'

'Who?'

'Your daddy. I see him at your house already get into his car with a briefcase.'

'You mean Mr Lizardy Man. That man is not my daddy!'

'Why you call him so?'

'Promise you won't tell?'

'Promise.'

'Because he look just like a lizard ha-ha.'

'Shelly-Ann, you too foolish. Lizard green. He not green.'

'He wear lizard-skin shoes.'

'They don't have lizard-skin shoes. How much lizard you think they would have to kill to make one pair of shoes?'

'Well, I don't business with that. That's what he wear. And he just lie there all day long watching TV with his lizard-skin shoes sticking out over

the edge of the couch. The living room dark like anything for he pull the curtain. And he just lie there all day long. Without moving. Don't move at all. Look just like an ugly croaking lizard.'

'So what your mother would be doing with a lizard-man then?'

'She not my mother.'

'Shelly-Ann! You story. Is your mother. I hear my mother say so, and she don't lie. Gatha say she is your mother. I even hear you call her Mummy plenty time. So how come all of a sudden she not your mother?'

'She not my mother.'

'So who is she then?'

'She is the Lizardy Man's lady ha-ha.'

'Cho. You too foolish. We playing this game or what? Or you just going to stand there the whole day telling lie?'

'Don't say that. I don't tell lie.'

'You do too. You just told some fantastic ones.'

'Didn't.'

'Did.'

'Didn't.'

'Did.'

'Didn't.'

Jesus Mary and Joseph! Children! Shelly-Ann, you shouting again. You know what, Miss, one more peep out of you and I lick you till you fene today. You hear me? Miss Ersie, I really can't take these naughty children, you know. Next time I come back for a chat, I am coming by my own self. And that will serve you right, Shelly-Ann.

... anyway, Miss Ersie, me feel seh, plenty something a go on. Me can't say me see anything you know, but nobody can convince me that she not taking some of them something herself. Me never see her tek nothing, me can't lie and say me see it, though me know them smoke the weed there hard hard. But that is nothing; she been doing that long time now; long before she meet this man here. But me know seh, these last few months, she really change. Sometimes you see her there, she just out of this world. Just like the other one there. The man. Is two weeks now him no leave the house you know. The two of them. Lock up inside the house there day and night. Me not lying to you. Me feel something gwine happen. Is like the two of them just waiting for something to happen. And she not paying the little pickney one mind. Almost have to say the child don't have mother again. It break my heart to see how she treating little Shelly-Ann. That's why she get rude and giving so much trouble. The little child can't even go near the mother now, she push her away, tell her to go and play. Have no time for her at all. Sometime is as if she don't even see her.

Me not lying, me would really like to get out. For from my mother born and grow me, I never mix up in nothing yet. And me would gone long time, Miss Ella or no Miss Ella. But me can't bring myself to leave the little one here. For if it wasn't for me, she wouldn't have a soul to mind her.

Them say cockroach nuh business inna fowl roos. And I am a woman that know how to keep my own counsel. But I decide I going to take it upon my head to write to her grandmother. Going to send her a letter. Eh, what you think Miss Ersie? Don't you think I have every right to put the case before her? Write her and beg her no matter what, she is please to come for the child?

Well, there you have it. You right, the child have a father even though she don't see him from one year to the next. But is still her father. Maybe he is the right one to come. I am going to write Miss Ella mother and put the case and she will know what to do. For you have to say now Shelly-Ann don't have no mother. Mother don't business with her at all t'all. Mother head gone, you have to say, the way she behave. And me can't carry on no more. Me nuh care if Miss Ella vex when she find out. Me can't deal with her and her jingbang life no longer. For she not the same person me did agree to go to work for. Is like a different somebody. This situation just can't go on.

'Shelly-Ann, you know what?'

'What?'

'Your father there. Alright then. The Lizardy Man. You know he is a dealer?'

'A what?'

'A dealer. I don't know is what exactly. But is a bad thing. I hear my mother and father talking about it. They don't like how he living on the same street with us. Say plenty bad things going to happen.'

'I know one bad thing already.'

'What?'

'Is a secret.'

'But I just tell you a secret.'

'Okay then. The Lizardy Man have some guns.'

'Guns? You mean he have more than one?'

'Eh-hm.'

'What kind of guns?'

'I don't know.'

'How they stay?'

'Well one is little, like what the detectives use on TV. The bad guys too. When they say "Hands up" or something like that. The one they put to your head and go click click. The Lizardy Man have one of those. He have it with him all the time.'

'Cho. That is nothing. My daddy has one of those. He sleeps with it in the bedroom. In case he has to shoot a thief.'

'No thief coming to our house. You know is four bad dogs we have. Doberman at that.'

'Well we have bad dogs too. Ridgeback worse than Doberman any day. Badder than bad. But thief can still come. That's why my daddy has his gun.'

'Well we have security fencing. And electric gate. You don't have that. Anybody can just drive into your yard. Our gate only open when the Lizardy Man drive up and press something in the car and it make the gate open. Or else you have to press a buzzer and the Lizardy Man will talk to you from the house. Then he decide if he is going to let you in or not. Nobody can just drive in as they like.'

'How the other gun stay?'

'He have another one hide in the clothes closet in the bedroom. Is like what the police carry.'

'What? A M-16?'

'I don't know is what. Same like you see the police driving around in their jeep with.'

'M-16, to rhatid!'

Well, Miss Ersie. I must go. Time to get dinner ready. Not that anybody in that house bother to eat. Food just cook and it throw way same way. The dogs eat better than the people. Pure raw meat him feed them on, you know. Every day the one Troja there, the bwoy that work for him, every day Troja gone a butcher for the living raw meat to feed the dog them. Well, me glad that that is not part of my job, having anything to do with them animal. For me naw lie, Miss Ersie, well, you come up there and you see for yourself, you see how them stay. Don't them is like savage, man, like real wild animal? Me can't even stand to look at them for me know seh a nuh so dog suppose to look.

Anyway, is really gone a gone this time. Where is this child now? Shelly-Ann, say goodbye to Roger, dear, and come. Yes we have to go now. No Shelly-Ann, you can't stay here with Roger, you have you ownna house to go to. Listen nuh pickney, don't form fool with me, you hear. What you crying for? You want a give you something to make you cry? Hush. I will bring you back tomorrow to play with Roger. I promise. Say goodbye to Miss Ersie now. That's a good girl. Well, a gaan, mi dear. And I going to do what a tell you. Tomorrow, you hear.

Lawd Shelly-Ann, what you bawling for? Your mother will think is beat a beating you, man. Come, mek me dry yu eye, you can't go home to your mother looking like this. Seh what, seh you don't have no mother? How

you can say such a thing chile and you have yu good-good mother at yu yard. Oh my poor little innocent lamb, you must never say such a thing, dear. I know she not paying you too much mind these days but Shelly-Ann you is a big girl now so you must understand. Your mother not well, so you must try and see with her. She will soon get better and treat you nice and loving the way she always treat you. Say what wrong with her? She just not well Shelly-Ann. She have big people complaint. Say what that is? Listen nuh pickney, what is wrong with you? Why you have to ask question so? Just don't bother to try my spirit, you hear.

Lawd have mercy! Shelly-Ann, stop! Stop. Stop. Stop. Right there. Don't go one step further. Shelly-Ann, you hear me? Come back. Aright. Don't move from here, chile. Stand right here so. I don't like what I see. Shelly-Ann, how the gate throw wide open so? You ever see the gentleman leave the gate open yet? And him car right there in the garage. And where the dog them, Shelly-Ann? Is who open the gate? You think the dog them run weh? Jesus save us, is what this on me today? Girl, something just tell me we not to go in there. We not to go in there at all. Come. We going right back down to Miss Ersie. We can phone your mother from there. Something just tell me we not to go in. Don't like what a seeing at all t'all. Shelly-Ann, what you think happen to the dog them, and the gate wide open? Jesus, what a autoclaps if them loose on the street and we buck them up! Come, pickney. Mek we tek foot and run, you hear.

'What happen, Shelly-Ann, why you come back?'

'I don't know. Gatha say I must come and play with you. Roger, you know what, something happening at our yard.'

'What?'

'I don't know. We never go in. Gatha gone to phone my mother.'

'How you mean?'

'She say we not to go in. For the gate was wide open. And the Lizardy Man car was there.'

'So what if the gate open?'

'I tell you already, that gate never open. Only if the Lizardy Man press a button and open it himself. Even for us. Mummy and me and Gatha, when we want to come and go. He or Troja always there to open the gate. But they never ever leave it open. As soon as you gone through, they close it again.'

'So what you think happen?'

'I don't know.'

'My daddy said something bad was going to happen.'

'Gatha said so too.'

'Maybe they gone out and forget to lock back the gate.'

'No. Roger?'

'What?'

'I know something that happen. Something bad.'

'Bad like what?'

'Well. I don't know if Gatha did see. But I see, Roger. I see two dead dog lying on the lawn.'

JOHN THIEME

'Mixed Worlds': Olive Senior's *Summer Lightning*

Superficially the bulk of the stories in Olive Senior's *Summer Lightning* (1986) are primarily naturalistic accounts of a particular experience of growing up in rural Jamaica in the 1940's and 1950's. The stories repeatedly construct a situation in which a child-protagonist, usually a girl, has been displaced from the peasant home of her early youth and relocated in a middle-class household. Senior has said that this situation replicates the experience of her own youth,¹ which involved a similar movement between houses and made her socially, as well as racially, 'a child of mixed worlds, socialized unwittingly and simultaneously into both',² and the reader who knows this, even if s/he is anxious to avoid seeing the text simply as a fictionalized transcription of aspects of the author's own experience, may well be tempted to assume that its range is narrowly circumscribed by the particular nature of this situation represented. In fact, although the stories of *Summer Lightning* do work extremely well as naturalistic accounts of Jamaican rural life and owe much to their being rooted in concrete particularities, the predicament of the displaced child provides a medium for commenting on central conflicts of the society more generally. The accounts of ways in which children are socialized open up windows on issues of class, race, religion, education, gender, sexuality, language and migration.

Frequently the child who acts as the pivotal point of a particular story, whether as a first- or third-person centre of consciousness, is initiated into knowledge about the behavioural imperatives of the society, discovers that these are by no means monolithic and becomes involved in making some kind of tacit choice between its discrepant codes. In 'Bright Thursdays' the protagonist Laura, the child of an extra-marital liaison between a dark-skinned countrywoman and a fair-skinned 'young man of high estate'³ who has since been shipped off to the United States, is sent by her mother to live in the household of her middle-class paternal grandparents with the injunction to 'let them know you have broughtuptcy' (p. 36). Unfortunately Laura finds that any 'broughtuptcy' she does have still leaves her a misfit in her new environment, where a meal instead of being 'something as natural as breathing is a ritual, something for which you prepared yourself by washing your hands and combing your hair and straightening

your dress before approaching the Table' (p. 37), and is left feeling that there is 'no space allotted for her' (p. 37). Arguably the story, like the majority of the pieces in *Summer Lightning* is about the attempt to claim a space for oneself or, as Senior has put it herself, 'to create self-identity out of chaotic personal and social history'.⁴

Laura's sense of insecurity in her new social world is figured most strikingly in her response to clouds she observes as she waits for the bus that takes her to school. She associates these with pictures of Jesus she has seen in Sunday School, in which he is represented as descending to earth on a white cloud. Having had the notion that he is a God of judgement and punishment instilled into her through the church, the pictures make her feel that she is a sinner about to be visited by such a God, who will 'one day soon appear out of the sky flashing fire and brimstone to judge her' (p. 46). So her reaction to the clouds can be read as an expression of her guilt-ridden feelings of social inferiority and sense that she will be judged by some patriarchal authority figure. In the denouement, her father returns to Jamaica for a visit with his white American wife. Laura sees him as a rescuer-figure who will release her both from her fear of clouds and the uncertainty that surrounds her Thursdays, a day that she has always felt either 'turned out to be very good or very bad' (p. 36). However, on his return, her father proves to have no real interest in her at all – he is neither a deliverer nor a patriarchal God of judgement – and she receives rather more attention from his wife. The obvious conclusion, that fathers are not knights in shining armour who come to rescue latter-day Rapunzels from the misery of everyday life and that, if Laura is to achieve any kind of self-affirmation, it will be through her own endeavours, is reinforced at the very end of 'Bright Thursdays', when she overhears her father refer to her as a 'bloody little bastard' (p. 53). In a second she makes herself an 'orphan' (p. 53), thereby renouncing any loyalties she has previously felt towards the middle-class world, and dissipating the threatening clouds. This makes explicit what has been implicit throughout: that what she has taken to be some kind of malevolent force in the natural world is in fact a product of her own particular psycho-social conditioning. Her decision to 'orphan' herself emancipates her both from the middle-class social aspirations inculcated in her by her mother and from the guilt-ridden sensibility induced in her by a branch of the Christian religion⁵ that reinforces the society's class and colour hierarchies. She is left a free agent to find the space that she has hitherto felt 'Life' has not allotted her. 'Bright Thursdays' is typical of *Summer Lightning* in its skill in depicting areas of major social conflict through nuances and for the subtle way in which it exposes how the socially constructed has been naturalized.

The stories encompass a broad range of Jamaican social experience and span the whole range of the linguistic continuum⁶ with an easy movement between different tonal registers and between Creole and Standard English

in the narrative voices employed. Class snobberies are at the centre of 'Real Old Time T'ing'; 'Ascot' is concerned with migration abroad and the different responses the metropolitan success of the trickster-hero elicits in those who have remained behind; 'Country of the One Eye God', the one story set in a later period – the 1970's – dramatizes conflicts between generations and rural and urban value-systems, particularly in the area of religion. And religion is also to the fore in 'Confirmation Day', a first-person account of a girl's fearful response to becoming 'a child of god' (p. 81) which uses the clouds metaphor of 'Bright Thursdays' in an almost identical way, and 'Do Angels Wear Brassieres', in which the precocious Becca, a more socially confident child-protagonist than Laura, subversively refashions God in her own image as 'a big fat anansi in the corner of the roof'⁷ and, completely uncowed by the judgemental aspects of the respectable brand of local Christianity that instil fear into Laura, envisages a gossipy neighbour who calls her 'the devil own pickney' (p. 68) being punished in the after-life: 'Fat Katie will get her comeuppance on Judgement Day for she wont able to run quick enough to join the heavenly hosts' (p. 70). The witty and irreverential tone is quite different from that of 'Bright Thursdays' and the comic use of Jamaican Creole perfectly complements the 'force-ripe' (p. 69) Becca's capacity to function as a satirist of social hypocrisy, particularly when she pits her biblical knowledge against that of a visiting archdeacon, asking him a series of riddles that culminates in the question that give the fiction its memorable title. Again the dominant thrust of the story is anti-middle class and, although its touch is light, it can be read as an attack on the way in which children are socialized into 'respectable' values (values which have their origins in the colonial culture) with a resultant loss of spontaneity and a positive response to the society's folk culture. All of these stories involve a dialogue between different areas of Jamaican social experience and in the two finest pieces, 'Ballad' and the title-story, the child-protagonist makes a choice between adult role models who represent the supposedly opposed worlds of the island's middle-class and folk cultures. 'Ballad', a sustained linguistic *tour de force* narrated in a 'mesolect' form of Jamaican Creole and incorporating forms closer to 'basilect'⁸ in its dialogue, juxtaposes the two cultures on the level of discourse, as is clear from its opening words:

Teacher ask me to write composition about The Most unforgettable Character I Ever Meet and I write three page about Miss Rilla and Teacher tear it up and say that Miss Rilla not fit person to write composition about and right way I feel bad...⁹ (p. 100)

Miss Rilla is 'not a fit subject' for scribal discourse in the context of the educational curriculum of the late colonial period, but the text itself opposes this view by instating her as the subject of the 'ballad' it foregrounds itself as being. Gradually it reveals why Miss Rilla has been seen

to be beyond both social and literary pales. As a 'scarlet woman' who has had a succession of lovers, some of them younger than herself and one of whom has been killed in a fight over her, she has infringed the sexual taboos of the society and not surprisingly this has stirred up the jealousy of 'respectable' women like the narrator Lenora's step-mother. However, on a more general level, Miss Rilla can be seen to embody the vibrancy of the oral, folk culture and a joy in life which transgresses the codes of the middle-class society in a more radically disruptive way. At several points Lenora speculates on whether Miss Rilla will be admitted into Heaven and by the end she decides she probably will be:

... if there is no forgiveness it mean that Miss Rilla is down there burning in hell fire. But I tell you already that I dont believe that at all. I believe that Miss Rilla laughing so much that Saint Peter take her in just to brighten up Heaven.¹⁰ (p. 134)

Earlier Lenora has been encouraged to study hard so that she can go on to high school and perhaps become a teacher, but the story ends with her expressing doubts as to whether she wishes to pursue this middle-class ideal and plumping instead for the folk values represented by Miss Rilla. In 'Summer Lightning' a lonely boy living in the middle-class household of his aunt and uncle takes refuge in a garden room of indeterminate identity and which he thinks of as his 'secret room, a place where he could hide during thunderstorms' (p. 1). Alienated from his snobbish aunt and his uncle, the boy finds his affections are fought over the Rastafarian Brother Justice and a mysterious man who comes to stay in the house for a few weeks each year 'for his "nerves"' (p. 1). The atmosphere is laden with menace and what Senior has referred to as 'the drama, magic, and mystery inherent in all human transactions'.¹¹ Like the boy, the reader has to decode ambiguous signifiers. Mysteries surround the nature of the strange man, the garden room and summer lightning. Equally enigmatic are his uncle's box-level, which is associated with memory and perception, and an ivory elephant which he is given by the 'man' with an instruction to turn it towards the door for luck, a gnomic piece of advice since the garden room in which he keeps it has three doors. As the story develops, the boy is drawn to the man's company and spends less time with his former friend Brother Justice, a figure of whom his aunt disapproves since his conversion to Rastafari has led to his deserting the 'respect for them which had been inculcated in men like him for centuries' (p. 6). Brother Justice, who has been disturbed many years before by the man's 'watching him the way he should be watching a woman' (p. 7), reacts by telling the aunt to look after the boy. The story reaches its climax with summer lightning flashing outside and the boy feeling threatened as, 'through a film like that covering the eye of the spirit level' (p. 10), he sees the man approaching him. The open-ended narrative breaks off here, leaving what happens next and the issue of whether the man is a child molester

unresolved.¹² All the major symbols are, however, reinvoked in the closing paragraphs and there is resolution of another kind, as the boy makes *his* social choice by seizing the ivory elephant and pointing it towards the garden door through which he feels sure Brother Justice will now come; he is no longer unsure as to where 'good luck' lies and consciously chooses the social outsider over the threatening middle-class character. And the narrative also clarifies the significance of the garden room. Immediately before the final incident the boy has felt that if the man ever touches him, 'everything – Bro. Justice, the room, the magic world, even the order of the aunt and uncle's life that he both loved and despised – would be lost to him for ever' (p. 9). The room and the things he associates with it are his childhood, to which he now clings desperately in the face of adult behaviour that threatens an end to innocence.

NOTES

1. Unpublished talk, University of North London, 8 May 1990.
2. Charles H. Rowell, 'An Interview with Olive Senior', *Callaloo*, 11, 3 (1988), 481. Subsequent references cite 'Rowell'.
3. *Summer Lightning* (London: Longman, 1986), p. 38. Subsequent references are to this edition and are cited in the text.
4. Rowell, p. 482.
5. Ostensibly the Anglican church, the state church of Jamaica. In her entry on the church in her *A-Z of Jamaican Heritage* (Kingston: Heinemann/Gleaner Co., 1983) p. 6, Senior comments: 'The Church of England was the church of the ruling class and planters and therefore supported the institution of slavery.'
6. David DeCamp, 'Social and Geographic Factors in Jamaican Dialects', in R.B. Le Page, ed., *Creole Language Studies* (London: Macmillan, 1961), p. 82, expresses the linguistic situation in Jamaica as follows: 'Nearly all the speakers of English in Jamaica could be arranged in a sort of linguistic continuum, ranging from the speech of the most backward peasant or labourer all the way to that of the well-educated urban professional. Each speaker represents not a single point but a span of this continuum, for he is usually able to adjust his speech upward or downward for some distance along it.'
7. Anansi (or Anancy) is a spiderman-trickster figure of the Akan peoples of West Africa, brought to the Caribbean by the slaves of the Middle Passage. As Senior notes in her *A-Z of Jamaican Heritage*, p. 5, he 'personifies the qualities of survival' in the face of colonial oppression. Anansi stories are among the most popular form of folk tales in Jamaica. Cf. Edward Kamau Brathwaite's representation of the subversive potential of the Anansi figure in 'Ananse', *The Arrivants*, pp. 165-7.
8. 'Basilect' is a term used to refer to that segment of the linguistic continuum that is assumed to be 'furthest' from Standard English; 'acrolect' that which is assumed to be closest; and 'mesolect' refers to all the intermediate varieties of the Creole. See Derek Bickerton, *Dynamics of a Creole System* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975), p. 24.
9. The essay-topic suggests the metropolitan model of the *Reader's Digest's* 'My Most Unforgettable Character' feature. Cf. similar passages in V.S. Naipaul's *A House for*

Mr. Biswas (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), pp. 356-7; and Jamaica Kincaid, *Annie John* (London: Picador, 1985), pp. 38-45.

10. Cf. Becca's imagined version of Fat Katie's 'comeuppance' on Judgement day, quoted above.
11. Rowell, p. 481.
12. Senior says, Rowell, p. 483: '... what you see on the page is only part of the story. The inexplicable, the part not expressed, the part withheld is the part that you the reader will have to supply from your emotional and imaginative stock... I believe it's my job as a writer not to say it all, for I am only one half of the equation – reader-writer – and that the work becomes complete only when it is read, when the reader enters the world I have created. I therefore tend to leave a lot of my work open-ended.'

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